

THE BURDEN OF ABSOLUTISM
TRANSCENDENT IDEALISM IN CLOUGH
AND DOSTOEVSKY

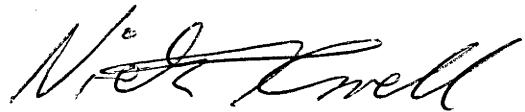
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DECLARATION

Unless otherwise acknowledged, all material presented in this thesis - "The Burden of Absolutism: Transcendent Idealism in Clough and Dostoevsky" - is the original work of the candidate.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nick Terrell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nick" and last name "Terrell" clearly distinguishable.

NICK TERRELL

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I attempt to explore some consequences of the nineteenth century loss of religious certainty, as its effects are reflected and worked through in literary works of the period. Since a comprehensive treatment is impossible within the scope of a thesis, I have chosen to concentrate on just two very different authors, the English poet Arthur Hugh Clough, and the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. As wide apart as these authors' works are in scope, ambition, literary mode, tone and attitude, and as wide apart as the authors are in historical background and cultural tradition, they nevertheless share key insights into the plight of idealistic, intellectually self-conscious individuals in the period. For such individuals, the absolute certitudes available in earlier times - certitudes which might have provided foundations for personal beliefs and life-goals and also for acceptance of social roles and conventions - could no longer serve.

Clough's and Dostoevsky's depictions of the commitment of self-conscious idealists (consequent on this loss of foundations) to describe and define their intellectual and emotional disorientation (and their searches for new certitudes), reveal and clarify some of the dilemmas of conviction and idealistic commitment which were generated by the disruption of what had previously appeared an authoritative source of moral absolutes and transcendent ideals.

Both authors' works illuminate the *role* transcendent ideals and abstractions sometimes play in individuals' relationships with others and with the world of ambivalent fact. In many ways, the reactions of Clough's and Dostoevsky's characters to disputed frameworks of traditionally authoritative belief and conduct present complementary extremes, respectively, those of uncertain conviction and passionate intensity (to borrow Yeats' dichotomy from "The Second Coming"). These extremes are bound by the characters' fundamentally sympathetic relationship, in the works of both authors, to idealism and to an abstract critical engagement with their respective realities; in a world that lacks a commonly accepted external authority, such engagement is maintained as a problematic but invaluable moral duty.

In such periods, where any absolute conviction or ideal can appear intrinsically guilty of having overlooked, or of disregarding, an array of equally credible alternative perspectives, attempts to sustain postures of absolute faith in subjectively affirmed or habitually maintained ideals are often beset with problems of "passionate intensity".

While esteem for absolute convictions is readily augmented by nostalgic idealisation of the security which the clear moral code and worldview provided by divine faith had formerly provided, the dangers which absolutist postures often engender can be attributed to habits of absolutism which this esteem tends to maintain. I hope to show that it is these habits which, incompatible with an ambivalent natural world, actually elicit, as much as they disclose, the specific shortcomings which often seem intrinsic to secular postures of faith and idealism.

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A NOTE ON TEXTS

For Clough's work I have drawn on J.P. Phelan's Longman edition of selected works: *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995). Specifically: *Amours de Voyage*, *Clough - Selected Poems*, 75-154, and *Dipsychus and The Spirit*, *Clough - Selected Poems*, 155-234. Where possible I have also used Phelan's edition as my source for Clough's shorter poems. Alternative sources and works which are discussed only briefly will be cited as necessary.

For Dostoevsky's main works I have used Pevear's and Volokhonsky's translations of *Notes from Underground* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) and *Crime and Punishment* (London: Vintage, 1993), and Alan Myers' translation of *The Idiot* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). I have also used translations by Ignat Avsey, A.D. Briggs, Jessie Coulson, Kyril Fitzlyon, Richard Freeborn, Constance Garnett, C.J. Hogarth, Jane Kentish, Kenneth Lantz, David McDuff, David Magarshack and David Patterson.

Again, alternative sources and publishing details of shorter works will be given in the text.

N.B. Due to the vagaries of the word-processing software I have used, footnotes will occasionally be held over to a following page. I apologise for any irritation this might cause but assure the reader that the footnotes are all there, but sometimes at a slight remove.

Introduction

The burden of absolutism, as I shall discuss it throughout this thesis, is experienced by individuals who find themselves bereft of external ideals: that is, ideals – or rules of life – derived from some source outside themselves, which they might have taken to carry an absolute authority. Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* worries that without the guidance provided by external absolutes "we won't know what to join, what to hold to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise".¹ When these characters confront the moral void which they feel God's death has exposed them to and ask themselves "What are we to resist, and what are we to be friends with?" (as Phillip does in Clough's *The Bothie*²), they ask this question with expectations, needs and desires forged by a tradition of moral imperatives and life goals that had been considered to owe their higher authority to a supernatural origin. Accordingly, the scope of the answers these characters seek, and of the moral imperatives through which they attempt to orient themselves (surrogates for values that had marked the line between eternal salvation and perdition), reflect the fastidious commitment to moral absolutism they have inherited: they seek ideal codes, general directives. From the outset, then, they appear unable to engage in the kind of pragmatic moral wranglings with uncertainty that might have provided at least something of the assurance they long for. The burden they take upon themselves imposes a highly distorting influence on their relationship to ambivalent reality. It is the nature of these distortions, and their origin in the incompatibility of absolutism with a clear view of ambivalent reality, with which I shall primarily be concerned. It is a premise of this thesis that acceptance of uncertainty and the challenging ambiguities of the natural world might offer a means of avoiding or defusing the individual dilemmas which these distortions specifically engender.

In Dostoevsky's work the 'new words' and surrogate consolations with which individuals seek to convince themselves (sometimes with success) that they have discovered what to love, what to hate, what to join, and what to oppose, prove essentially inadequate to the absolutist purposes they inherit. Both Dostoevsky and Clough show how these surrogate ideals can deliver the kind of absolute assurances these characters require only through the characters' tacit consent to solipsistic

¹ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (1864), trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky; 1993 (New York: Vintage Classics, 1994), 130.

seclusion from shared reality or their capricious denial of selective aspects of it. Clough and Dostoevsky each shows that these are habits which typically unravel in the face of worldly experience and interaction with other people.

I shall be focusing on depictions of how characters, deprived of faith in an external authority and order, but still beholden to the consolations and authoritative moral guidelines it had provided, react firstly to their individual intimations of transcendent ideals and order, and secondly to the uncertainty they confront in the absence of such.

* * * * *

To see the gods dispelled in mid-air and dissolve like clouds is one of the great human experiences. It is not as if they had gone over the horizon to disappear for a time; nor as if they had been overcome by other gods of greater power and profounder knowledge. It is simply that they came to nothing It was their annihilation, not ours, and yet it left us feeling that we, too, had been annihilated. It left us feeling dispossessed and alone in a solitude, like children without parents, in a home that seemed deserted ...

Wallace Stevens - "Two or Three Ideas".³

From the midst of these feelings of dispossession, man is left "to resolve life and the world in his own terms".⁴ And though Stevens, in 1951, can retrospectively correlate the anxiety of abandonment with a phase of cultural evolution, for those in the grip of this anxiety it is uncertainty - the *absence* of explanations, systems and consolations - that compels their quests for moral orientation and sustaining traditions. This uncertainty contains all that Stevens associates with it - feelings of annihilation and abandonment - but it contains more: moral and spiritual uncertainty poses uncomfortable propositions to individuals seeking transcendent ideals, and it provokes, precipitates and otherwise harries their 'idealistic' reactions. The strong emotional inertia which influences individuals' relationship to religious assurances, to the moral order, and to the patterns of individual consolation which divine authority had guaranteed, ensures that reactions to this disorientation are moulded equally by the desire either to rectify, or to deny and defuse, the problems of fact and interpretation which arise when the gods disappear. This urge to rectify includes attempts both to

² Clough, *The Bothie* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976), IX.79.

³ Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 260.

⁴ Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, 260.

prove the persistent credibility of divine authority, and to activate new frames of authority capable of ensuring the same subordination of sociopathically individualistic behaviour.

Given the very different status and associations of their respective positions in current conceptions of nineteenth century literature, founding an argument on the works of Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61), an English poet with a modest reputation and relatively limited audience, and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), one of the most revered and enduring writers of the late nineteenth century, perhaps invites the reader into what seems from the outset a disorienting endeavour.⁵ From this outset then I would request my readers' indulgence in temporarily surrendering preconceptions of the relative merits or unshiftable particularity of these authors as I proceed throughout this introduction to elaborate the set of concerns for which this pairing provides a particularly salient resource of characters and circumstance.⁶

Until recently Clough has been treated as something of an oddity of Victorian literature, perhaps because of the displaced manner in which he addresses the domestic relevance of his concerns, and because of his cosmopolitan engagement with continental politics and philosophy. Encouraged by Carlyle's dissemination of contemporary German philosophy and literature (including, for example, the higher criticism of the Bible, Fichte's transcendental idealism, and the writings of Goethe), Clough engaged enthusiastically with the socially reformist discourses of European letters.

It is for this reason that the concerns which dominate Clough's work seem so readily to parallel predominant concerns across the western thought and literature of his era. And for this reason also, it is particularly rewarding to approach Clough as an English poet addressing abstract or metaphysical problems which span geographical

⁵ I have chosen to focus on Clough, as opposed to other poets and writers of the period who wrestle with the personal, social and historical implications of spiritual uncertainties (Browning, Tennyson or Matthew Arnold, for example) because Clough, as I shall discuss at greater length throughout this thesis, seems least inclined to prematurely curtail, simplify or delimit the ambiguities which his scepticism, and the scepticism of his characters, runs up against in the world of ambivalent facts. These same sorts of uncertainty, along with their factual bases are depicted by Dostoevsky in relation to a much wider range of circumstance and character, but in stark contrast this range and rigour are given a moral significance which amounts to precisely the kind of insistence on a singular absolute and synchronising certainty which is so antithetical to Clough's secular scepticism.

⁶ Given the nature of my use of foreign works in this thesis, stressing primarily circumstances of plot, character reactions and characterisation, it has appeared sufficient to rely on translations into English. In my closer reading of Dostoevsky's work I have relied on cross checking passages to avoid idiosyncratic translations. Where particular words and sentences have appeared potentially contentious I have gratefully relied on Professor Iain Wright's translations from the Soviet Academy of Sciences' edition of

borders and relate to shared aspects of cultural and spiritual traditions throughout the liberal West. There is simply no other English poet who depicts the complex interaction between emotion and intellect in the face of uncertainty so uncompromisingly at the time.⁷

This thesis will primarily be concerned with depictions of the capacity of transcendent (and typically abstract) ideals to compensate for the ‘death’ of God. This capacity will be explored through the individual characters, who *act* as the registers, but are ultimately the *origins* of these abstract codes, and are therefore both the agents and locales in which this project of reorientation is played out. Focusing on these disoriented individuals as participants in a relationship with the ostensibly theoretical and scholarly pursuit of abstract ideals reveals how various imprinted anxieties and needs are being ministered to or placated under the guise of abstract disinterested metaphysical quests.

My usage of the term “transcendent idealism” is probably best defined through the people who are committed to it. Transcendent idealists demonstrate a desire to recognise ideals: sources, that is, of meaningful life-goals and moral values which transcend their individual circumstances and interests. Often, particularly in the absence of any commonly accepted authority, this desire leads to a tendency to idealise mere intimations or partial notions of such abstract and transcendent moral codes and life-goals. This desire is formed, perhaps, by influences of tradition, religious indoctrination, or merely by an individual’s desire for clear order sparked by confrontation with a world that seems reprehensibly chaotic or unjust. Transcendent idealisms, then, are extrapolations of *particular* intuitions, beliefs and prejudices into the form of general principles that ostensibly offer rules abstracted from the particularities which might necessitate acknowledgment of the ambiguity or partiality of the resulting principles. Formed in abstraction from ambivalent reality, such ideals offer modes of conduct and life-goals which appear qualified to authoritatively direct

Dostoevsky’s complete works: F.M. Dostoevsky, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii v Tridtzati Tomakh* (Leningrad 1972-1990).

⁷ Early in the twentieth century T.S. Eliot utilised a similar array of semi-alienated, sympathetically critical characters and characterisations of individual and intellectual conditions (as did Ezra Pound in his *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* poems). In the late nineteenth-century, George Gissing touched on these kinds of dilemmas (particularly in *Born in Exile* (1892)), though without the level of attention that we see in Clough’s work to these characters’ entanglement in ideological and metaphysical abstractions. Gissing emphasises, rather, the social reality and the practical implications of romantic and noble ideals and altruistic tendencies in an increasingly materialistic society, and the embeddedness in concrete circumstances (of class, money and ambition for example) of the ideologies with which individuals

individuals in their moral equivocations, regardless of circumstantial complexities; they dismiss the anxiety of establishing, perpetually, what is proper or right in a particular circumstance, and replace it with a ready certitude that relates to all circumstances as instances of general rules. In reflection of these characters' common commitment to pursue authoritative moral directives and ideals at a level of intellectual abstraction from circumstantial contingencies I will at times refer to characters' 'abstract ideals', or their 'abstract idealism', and their commitment (or recourse) to abstraction. The idealists I shall focus on exemplify how, in the absence of a commonly accepted transcendent authority, these types of rules often tend rather to reflect rationalisations of merely *desired* absolute certainties. These desired certainties, though essentially expressions of reaction against a paralysing uncertainty, have been generalised into images of external objective truth.

I bring together Clough and Dostoevsky as two authors depicting explicitly and relentlessly the emotional and intellectual experience of individuals existing in what appears to be the moral void of divine disinheritance and spiritual uncertainty. Clough explores the situation of individuals who, in positions of personal abstraction from the imperatives of social involvement and domestic responsibility, from their particular social position, and from any broader sense of community, interrogate their own capacity to distinguish truth, express truth and maintain their conviction of what appears to be truth.⁸ Clough's major works are almost entirely concerned with the subjective perspective of this type of character; his works provide a distilled, highly abstract persona which nevertheless remains bound to a reality it finds unsatisfactory.⁹ The poems maintain and interrogate the tension between worldly limitation and the transcendent urges of idealistic devotion. Such circumstances are amenable to Clough's sceptical approach to self-conception and, given the suspension from their everyday

tended, whether cynically or sincerely, to rationalise, or at least reconcile themselves to, the iniquities and injustices of capitalist materialism so as to flourish or survive under it).

⁸ By "community" in this instance I am referring to the actual broad community the characters are a part of, English Victorians, for instance, as opposed to notions of the community of mankind. "Brotherhood", in that it avoids the obvious sense of distinction and alienation from the actual populace they live in, is a much more appealing concept to their impulses to express themselves in terms of general human significance. Arnold's brotherhood of a 'classless' humanity relies on the indoctrination of all members in the terms of right reason, individuals have to meet the criteria to be embraced in the human democracy.

⁹ Discussing *Amours de Voyage* in *The Poetry of Clough: An Essay in Revaluation* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1963), Walter E. Houghton pays particular attention to Clough's depiction of Claude's character as a self-conscious and self-critical manifestation of some typical habits of the anti-hero and the uncommitted intellectual. "By calling Claude an intellectual, I mean to deny that he is a dilettante but not that he possesses certain characteristics of the breed which some people find unattractive" (119). Houghton describes Dipsychus also as a "highly educated intellectual", with a "deep

selves and situations, to the characters' recognitions and admissions of a dependency on factitious 'truths'. The potential trauma of admitting that conventions of purpose, employment, or personality are based on false certainties is liberated from the inertia imposed both by the conventions themselves and the prospect of taking one's place among them. The temptation to acknowledge factitious conventions as essentially valid (idealising what merely *is*), in order to ennoble or at least dignify one's participation, is at its most diffuse in Claude's remoteness, in *Amours de Voyage* (1849), from domestic habits, locales and attachments, but can be seen asserting a gravitational pull as Dipsychus contemplates a return to England and the imminent necessity of employment. In the space of their limbo Clough's characters are able to see and admit the rationalisations and contingencies which sustain many of the ostensibly sound 'reasons' and convictions they feel or expect to feel.¹⁰ In expediting Dipsychus' transition, in *Dipsychus and The Spirit*,¹¹ to a worldly and domestic reality, though, The Spirit's idealisation of middle-class necessity allows factitious conventions a semblance of authority. Answering his own need for both certainty and a rationale for his concessions to necessity, Dipsychus transfers his allegiance from solipsistic idealism to solipsistic cynicism, blaming the world for his compromise.

What for Clough is a crisis of the individual's ability to discern a role in society, brought about by challenges to previously absolute authorities, is extended in Dostoevsky's world view to a challenge against the core of social cohesion. Clough's longer poems depict the attempts of individuals to justify and sustain their idealistic

desire to preserve a kind of high integrity from contamination, whether by society or the exigencies of human existence" (160).

¹⁰ The effects of immediate and concrete social and domestic responsibilities on Dostoevsky's idealists are notably absent from Clough's depictions of relations between his idealists and reality. In his personal life, though, Clough was forced to make his own decisions and compromises and, having resigned his tutorship at Oxford in conscientious objection to subscription, was forced to seek employment, like Arnold, in a "growing bureaucracy of civil servants and government employees" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 167). In noting this fact, Armstrong contrasts it with Browning's expatriate position and Tennyson's freedom, as Poet Laureate, from the necessity of subsidising his literary activities through worldly employment. The contrast alludes to a different type of engagement with society in the writings of the wage labourers and vocational intellectuals and the more removed and aesthetic focus of the more independent men of letters.

¹¹ *Dipsychus and The Spirit* was never finalised by Clough, it was first published posthumously in *Letters and Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough* (1865). Consequently there is ambiguity about the order in which Clough intended the various scenes to proceed. In J.P. Phelan's prefatory notes to the version of the poem in the Longman selection of Clough's works, the version I refer to throughout, he discusses these textual complexities in detail, along with the poem's literary background and its biographical and historical resonances (see: *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (Longman Annotated Texts. London and New York: Longman, 1995), 155-58). Phelan explains that his own editorial decisions have been guided by an attempt to provide a version of the poem which is consistent "with the textual evidence" available in each of the four stages of its evolution (reinstating bowdlerised material, for example) and "supported by literary and structural evidence" (156). A more extensive account of the evolution of *Dipsychus and The Spirit* is given, again by Phelan, in "The Textual Evolution of Clough's Dipsychus

notion of the dignity of selfless duty to external absolutes. As Clough's characters explore the directives and assurances they have associated with this notion, though, they can find no values or directives that seem convincingly to justify such dutiful subservience. Clough shows these characters to be inhibited by a burdensome dependence on, or commitment to, an essential schema of externally given absolutes. In Dostoevsky's work, though, secular individualism is envisaged as a distraction from what remains, for him, a legitimate faith. It is a distraction, a lapse into dissociated somnambulism, which leads to moral isolation and the disintegration of the medium of moral agreement, self-denial or common purpose.

Dostoevsky's idealist activists exist in social and historical circumstances which necessitate, or at least encourage, the catalytic faustian compromise (a term I shall explain later), through which individuals can maintain their idea or ideal, and meet their world's demand for participation in a reality which is hostile to such fidelities. Dostoevsky's earlier works - contemporary with Clough's and each influenced in their way by the deterioration of the French Republic (in which abstract concerns seemed eclipsed by materialistic interests) - remain concerned with dreamers and thwarted idealists. Dostoevsky's reaction against the encroachments of secular individualism and 'Western' rationalism in Russia, exacerbated by the social upheavals leading up to and after the liberation of the serfs in 1861, translate in his novels to backgrounds of emergency and intellectual, spiritual and moral turmoil. The pressures experienced by Dostoevsky's characters, in relation to their rights and responsibilities to their communities and themselves, are extreme. Their propensity is towards discovery through action and transgression whereas Clough's poems anatomise conviction and commitment in more mundane and personal circumstances and in positions of rarefied abstraction from the kinds of pressures which precipitate the false certainties of Dostoevsky's characters.¹²

and The Spirit" (*Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language*, 46:182 (1995), 230-39).

¹² Russia's extraordinary cultural, historical and social development, particularly throughout the nineteenth-century, is often stressed; sometimes to the extent that the phenomena this development produced can seem to be subjects which are impenetrably remote and obscure to external examination. In Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911), for example, the English narrator repeatedly stresses the notion that the experiences and effects of having been bred into, and existing in, a state of autocracy, such as Tsarist Russia, are impenetrable to "western eyes", such as his own, and beyond the comprehension of those who have grown up with freedom of expression and thought. In a state of autocracy, for example, it is conceivable that knowing conformity could be perceived or judged to be a culpable act of complicity. Though reasons why individuals would be unable to express their dissent against repressive totalitarian regimes are countless (fear for themselves and those close to them, for example), the implied pressure on any critically aware and just-minded individual to oppose such repression is one example of the kind of ingrained idiosyncracies which Conrad's narrator alludes to. Between the implicit burden of an obligatory conscientious objection and the pressure engendered by a thorough comprehension of the

This thesis is not a study of influence or direct relationships between these two disparate authors (none are recorded or directly apparent), rather it is an exploration of their respective reactions to the failure of conventional governors of individual and communal moral agreement. Along with many other authors of the period, Clough and Dostoevsky share many common intellectual and cultural influences (John Stuart Mill's utilitarian philosophy, for instance, was enormously influential on the late nineteenth century Russian radicals), but these particular common influences, while important, are incidental instances of their implicit involvement in a broad cultural and intellectual milieu. Dostoevsky's insistent and urgent antagonism towards secular arrogation of spiritual authority, and the robust subtlety of Clough's scrutiny of received certainties, underpin depictions of the quest to ascertain the role of abstract ideals in a secular moral atmosphere. Dostoevsky's opposition to finite positivism furnishes him with a rhetorical position from which to *serve* his faith; he conducts this service with verve and a relentless penetration into the flaws and redemptive potential of the human subjects this service addresses. Clough's rejection of finite positivism is more extensive, it subjects his own prejudices and preferences to an erosive scepticism. He has no spiritual orientation analogous to Dostoevsky's, and this is why Dostoevsky's type of repudiation of a secular capacity for moral independence does not cloud Clough's depiction of the secular moral scene. In Clough's work, conclusions, or founding certainties (Dipsychus' commitment to the world, or Phillip's and Elspie's escape to a 'new world' in the colonies), can only be brought about through emotional and strategic approval of conventions in which conviction and idealism constitute the good manners of secular moral order. The difference between Dipsychus' resignation to these manners and Clough's representation of their role as terms of conscious moral agreement is the difference between a strategy for maintaining a persisting prestige for a dignifying idealistic service and an acceptance of the compromising pragmatism of finite moral responsibilities. But again, that strategy is not unequivocally decried: through its motivations and achievements it is revealed as a human utility overburdened by the obsolete heritage of divine authority. Dipsychus' desire to serve is admirable but

ruthlessly upheld conservatism of autocracy, dissent is potentially fraught with feelings of anguished moral compulsion or with justifications for unhappy acts of evasive compromise. Such postures, though not impenetrable or inconceivable in a democratic society, are at least not as uniform or unilaterally applicable as they are in an oppressive state such as Tsarist Russia.

Aspects of this kind of argument over cultural boundaries are noted by the Russian critic S. Zhozhikashvili, as he surveys (with a good deal of dismay) contemporary Dostoevsky scholarship in Russia and, albeit incidentally, notes the comparative merits of many foreign language studies ("Notes on Contemporary Dostoevsky Studies", *Russian Studies in Literature*, 54, 4 (1998), 56-92).

his insistence that what he serves be of absolute authority involves him in isolating and self-deluding rationalisations, leaving him vulnerable to worldly and cynical manipulation.

These authors depict experiences, common both in nineteenth century Europe and more generally, relating to a loss of moorings in conventional or personal faith. Given the limitations of a doctoral thesis, my scope will remain within the nineteenth century as the period not necessarily most beset by change but perhaps the least conceptually equipped to deal with the idea of change as an ongoing condition rather than a means of transition between otherwise stable epochs.

The characters I shall examine share the background of a revolutionised Europe in which traditional political conventions have been shattered. They are confronted by a pervading spiritual unease as the literal truth of the Bible is brought into question and foundations of religious faith shaken. They consequently wrestle with, and thereby demonstrate, an acceleration of ideological awareness relating to the individual self as a potential reservoir of spiritual and cultural self-reliance, and as a focus of secular attempts to validate spiritual desires and dimensions of experience without resorting to external frames of authority.¹³

The nineteenth century finds the individual struggling to come to terms with upheavals in religious and political convention, and with new notions of person-hood (that is, the theoretical rights and obligations of the individual). These struggles naturally placed strain on conventional or traditional habits of self-orientation and self-representation. The characters I am discussing exist, therefore, in an atmosphere of revaluation and reorientation of personal and social moral obligations.¹⁴ They are pre-

¹³ The romantic spirituality of the sublime, and the concern for the development of individual culture, incorporate attitudes towards the self inherited from Rousseau's suggestions of the paramount significance of the subjective individual as both determining and adjudicating over abstract moral conduct. The subjective confession effects the arrogation, by the individual conscience, of the moral jurisdiction of stable absolute laws. The minutiae of the individual's self-consciousness become the potential source of its moral enlightenment, but not as the provision of an underlying moral core, rather through the awareness of the strategic and distorting involvement of the individual self with its own conscience and self scrutiny.

¹⁴ In the early nineteenth century, Hegel had suggested the possibility that the tide of history and the force of cultural development could legitimately be proposed as consequences of the expression of an individual will. Napoleon was the provocation for this notion and is then offered as an exemplary affirmation of it. In *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), Lukács notes that "Hegelian philosophy draws all the inferences from the new progressive historicism. It sees man as a product of himself and of his own activity in history" (28). Which means that humanity evolves along with the changes in its circumstances. Lukács observes that Hegel's conception of historical development was generated to justify the French Revolution against those who considered revolution to be incompatible with historical progress. Lukács notes also that from the French Revolution onwards cultural progress requires, or is felt to require, ideological justification of its legitimacy as a part of a historical sequence. The nature of these justifications is inherently abstract and generalising, they

eminently concerned with their own isolated attempts to invest existence with meaning, beyond material needs and pleasures, and with their adopted duty (or a troubling intuition thereof) to elicit from these attempts a broader framework of individual responsibility to society or to a generalised principle of meaning (a transcendent ideal). But these desires, recognitions and responsibilities all encode the persistence of uncertainty as the backdrop of human idealism. Essentially, they confront the spiritual and social moral scenario which suggests to Dmitry Karamazov that perhaps “all is permitted”, and apply themselves to it in the hope and intention of discriminating and validating a vital and pertinent code of moral conduct capable of justifying moral limitations and responsibility for self-control.

In 1822 Stendhal noted: “The new generation has nothing to *continue* but everything to *create*. The great merit of Napoleon is that *he made a clean sweep*”.¹⁵ Stendhal’s pronouncement on the political *carte blanche* facing the post-revolutionary generation evokes the liberating effect of the void left in the cessation of Napoleon’s Empire. By the end of the revolutions of 1848 and 1849 the liberty to create had, for many, soured into a burdensome esteem for an increasingly futile project. Creating any ideology or abstract binding idea more compelling than the free exploitation and competition of *laissez-faire* economics became a more and more daunting prospect as prosperity increased and larger segments of society became dependent on the benefits of commerce at some level. The liberating challenge of a secular *carte blanche* seems to crystallise into the undifferentiated cacophony of special pleading which characterises attempts to decipher the indistinct sensations of doing battle by night.

Uncertainty is the adversary that provokes Dostoevsky’s attempts to reinvigorate absolute moral guidelines. Uncertainty is also, therefore, the essence of the worlds in which his characters exist and conduct their own searches for credible moral orientation and life-goals.

In order to demonstrate the embeddedness of Clough and Dostoevsky in a pervasive discourse concerning the legitimacy of the traditional roles of abstract idealism in the absence of common certainties, I shall refer also to other nineteenth century European authors who share a commitment to evaluating, modernising and sustaining a tradition of Western culture and individual liberty within their particular communities. A

impose an atmosphere in which this becomes the habitual tenor of ideology and cultural criticism. This habit is evident, for example, in the inflation of individual culture into a spiritual pursuit.

¹⁵ Stendhal, *Love*, trans. Gilbert & Suzanne Sale (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), Book II, Aphorism 133, 25.

cosmopolitanism of abstract thought and literature becomes the basis of parallel reactions to upheavals in abstract frameworks, across cultural and national borders. This “cosmopolitanism” generates a community wherein external cultural materials are studied and imbibed with as much reverence as local realities, if not more (a facet which depictions of these characters is able to use for the full delineation of the motivations behind such selective appetites).

Tensions between abstract and practical moral validity implicit in the interrelationship of custom, conformity, compromise and criticism are not specific to any one time or nation. These are symptoms of metaphysical unrest and upheaval.

“Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind” in a “maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal”.¹⁶ Under this presumption, Marshall Berman gathers a variety of representatives, both authors and fictitious characters, of the experience of modernism. Rather than uniting “mankind”, though, this kind of intellectual experience of uncertainty unifies the class who are given to such generalisations; the unification is implied, rather than achieved, in the common discourse of abstract engagement with reality. These registers share a common exposure to cultural upheaval in the nineteenth-century, and considered together provide an interrelationship in which patterns of disorientation and reaction appear. Though particular cultural analogies and sub-types which are more literally similar emerge through such a method as Berman’s, these are not fundamental to its more general fertility. And ‘general’ in this sense is a mildly deceiving term in that the patterns I intend to explore will become apparent through an essentially particularising focus on individual reactions to metaphysical disorientation. The common experiences and habitual reactions which emerge through this particularising focus are not intended to suggest any broad underlying cultural homogeneity; rather, they serve to demonstrate a widespread susceptibility, among the intellectual idealists I am discussing, to common emotional and intellectual dilemmas. The depictions of these characters, and their abstract dilemmas, offer representations of a type of problematic relationship between idealistic affinities and the realistic possibilities of expression which confront those individuals who confront and struggle with uncertainty in the hope of re-conceiving an absolute ideal.

¹⁶ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London & New York: Verso, 1983), 15.

In Turgenev's *On The Eve*, Pavel Shubin (a 'superfluous man') responds to a friend's reproach - "We were talking about the others, but you... I mean ... you start talking about yourself"¹⁷ - with an apology on behalf of a general situation of which (having been formed by it) he considers himself emblematic:

How justly you struck at my egoism and self-esteem. You're right, you're right: its no good bragging and talking about oneself. We haven't got anything among us, no real people, wherever you look. It's all either minnows and mice and little Hamlets feeding on themselves in ignorance and dark obscurity, or braggarts throwing their weight about, wasting time and breath and blowing their own trumpets. Or else there's the other kind, always studying themselves: "That's how I feel, and that's what I think." What a useful, sensible sort of occupation.¹⁸

The notion that the qualities and failings associated with "us" imply a distinctly Russian character gives an example of the at once particular and accurate and at the same time grossly over-simplifying and generalising habits which often influence the responses of this type of individuals to their subjectivity and self-awareness. Such elegies are typically uttered by particular types of characters, whose actual cultural peer group, to whom the "we" more accurately applies, represents a class of individuals rather than a nationality: intelligentsia and aesthetes; scrutineers of the respective abstract bases of their cultures' prevailing values.¹⁹ The Underground Man, for instance, considers himself a "practitioner" of thought. His peers, in a general sense, are those who identify with a similar practice: characters like Raskolnikov, whose vocation is to think things

¹⁷ Ivan Turgenev, *On the Eve*, trans. Gilbert Gardiner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950), 197.

¹⁸ *On the Eve*, 197.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the word "intelligentsia", and the connotations that attend the basic, and rather vague, meaning it communicates, are both taken directly from Russia, and from its specialised significance as the label for the type of individuals and groups of individuals who undertook the critical investigation of, and often opposition to, the conventions and sanctioned truths which were utilised to rationalise the totalitarian authority of the Tsarist state.

The Russian intelligentsia developed with their self-image formed both in esteem of certain abstract principles and equally in opposition to the authoritarian regime which conforming society seemed tacitly to approve; generalised protests of idealism are fused with a circumstance of immediate hostility and tyranny. In their introduction to Chernyshevsky's radical reformist novel *What Is to Be Done?* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1989), Michael Katz and William Wagner discuss the distinguishing particularities of the active radical intelligentsia (on whose behalf Chernyshevsky proselytises) in relation to the context of Russian social history of the period. The characteristics attributed to the younger intelligentsia (the 1860s radicals; the 'sons' as opposed to the 'fathers' of the 1840s), such as their "sense of mission and alienation from the state" (Katz & Wagner, 2), reflects a posture which becomes common among the intelligentsia as modern secular ideologies come to dominate and superficially validate the conventions of the broader community, in the divorce of social convention from a credible external authority. Katz & Wagner refer to the "sociological process of education", "the formulation of ideological beliefs", and "the psychological experience of alienation" as possible factors in the formation and the particular nature of such groups (2).

out in his room, and Claude, in *Amours*, who judges his detachment from active life as an inevitability of his role as a contemplative creature.

In relation to the broader community in which they live – urbanising, bureaucratic, industrial and commercial – the attitudes adopted by intellectuals in the modernising Western nations exhibit some common ways of reacting to modernisation's serial patterns of cultural disruption. Turgenev's or Chekhov's middle-class intellectuals have more abstract dilemmas, solutions or solaces in common with similar characters in the works of Clough, Gissing or Goethe, than with 'the people' whose national tradition they ostensibly share.²⁰

My case is selective and tentative. It is not my intention to establish the existence of broad historical or sociological phenomena, or reductively to abduct these characters and works from their cultural and social circumstances. I shall be focusing on the striking similarities, and parallels which emerge through these authors' depictions of intellectuals and idealists as registers of social upheaval and spiritual displacement brought about by common uncertainties surrounding religious creeds and moral codes (the whole assemblage of beliefs, ideals, values and aspirations which had formerly seemed authoritative).

The characters I am focusing on – educated, introspective and idealistic – esteem and seek to validate notions of abstract duty, spiritual dignity, and an idea of moral order. This determines their receptiveness to the signs and implications of moral uncertainty and their tendency to react to these signs in ways that fall into patterns for coping with, or dispersing, feelings of emotional and intellectual deprivation and anxiety. These patterns will be discussed at length in the body of this thesis.

²⁰ Dostoevsky's recurring diagnoses of self-consciousness as an alien cultural sickness are made in relation to an idealisation of the purity of the Russian soul. These diagnoses rely also on allowing that a generalised image of the Russian historical and cultural situation will always dominate the fact that it is made-up of human individuals, with hopes, anxieties and appetites similar to those of individuals in disparate cultures, who Dostoevsky is relying on to fulfil his prophecy, by producing the "new word" which will redeem Europe. To maintain that the Russian heart – unregenerate, fallible, *human* – is essentially different in conformation as opposed to preoccupation (the directions of its "interests") is somewhat outlandish. It is true that Dostoevsky frequently claims precisely this; Gogol, though, in registering similar crises in the "Russian personality", could allow that it reflected a human "spiritual" necessity, which was not particular to race or geography (he condemned the fading spirituality of humanity as a unilateral blight). The difference between Gogol's attribution and Dostoevsky's is due, perhaps, to Dostoevsky's conviction that the Russian personality contained the seeds of a solution to the spiritual sickness he associated with Western culture. For this to be possible Dostoevsky must think of the Russians as having been infected by a sickness which is alien to their intrinsic national character.

It is interesting to note that the gradual purging of the Russian bourgeoisie after the 1917 Revolution essentially conferred on them this status of infected, un-Russian intruders; the exorcism of western individualism which Dostoevsky had allegorised in *Demons* is acted out bodily.

Due to their relationship with abstract disciplines, it is typically intellectuals who perceive the “battle by night” which, taking place in the relatively obscure realm of universal values, proceeds “behind” convention. Similarly, it is this tacit community which, while familiar with the implausibility and limitations which absolutes rely on for credibility, is nevertheless (along with the credulous) most typically attracted, emotionally and intellectually, to the certainty they represent. Scepticism’s unsettling effect of placing moral responsibility in a constantly fluid and multifaceted environment requiring persistent re-evaluation (or deliberate non-participation rather than unpregnancy), inclines sceptics to envy the comforting certainty of faith. Through the distortions with which people unwittingly sanctify their self-interests and become unable to formulate or acknowledge the true nature of this moral burden, Dostoevsky depicts the divisive separateness of secular individualism. The effects on human relationships of an increasingly sceptical and secular culture prompt his rhetorical promotion of the notable absentee, faith, as the cornerstone of social stability and cultural well-being.

As registers of an upheaval and an apparent absence of unimpeachable moral and abstract comforts, these characters – marginal intellectual figures – are used to enact and express the unsettling awareness, and the denied awareness, of the problematic role of secularised abstract ideals in sustaining a desired relationship to moral absolutes. This problem is most apparent in the difficulties which individuals experience in attempts to locate or elaborate a system of moral limitations and goals without a common external authority (particularly in the consequences that ensue when these difficulties are factitiously surmounted, or allowed to stand but deemed a sign of the impoverishment of secular morality).

It is one of the main problems in any crisis of faith that individuals begin to recognise the emotional particularity of their bonds to dictates that had seemed intrinsically authoritative. In their persisting attachment to such dictates and worldviews, in spite of rational repudiation of their transcendent authority, individuals are confronted by the implication that their approval had always contained a merely emotional element. Individuals’ consequent loss of confidence in their capacity to objectively recognise the absolute order they long for so ardently introduces a further source of stifling anxieties.

The depiction and exploration of this circumstance is certainly not particular to Clough and Dostoevsky; it is a recurrent and pervasive concern in the period. While characters in the works of Turgenev and Tolstoy, for example, have more of the

gentrified ease on which Clough's depictions of the displaced Claude and Dipsychus nevertheless rest, in Dostoevsky's work the kind of aesthetic inner life and the dreams and protests of the abstract idealist are reified and tested against reality under the conditions of the authority to which they aspire.

Rather than seeking to combine Clough and Dostoevsky as instances of a common circumstance, the benefit of exploring their respective reactions to moral relativism together is in their extreme and readily apparent differences. In the distemper of their characters' idealistic alienation from reality, and in the habits of these characters' supervision of the relationship between reality and their ideals, the function of transcendent ideals in the secular world becomes suggestively apparent.²¹

Both Dostoevsky and Clough depict their characters' fidelity to abstractions alongside reality's resistance to the postures and expectations which these abstractions approve. The role of ideas is to the fore in these authors' methods of characterisation not in the manner of a *roman à thèse*, but as an element of the individual drama of character formation and individual orientation to the world.

In both authors' works, the language and attitudes of transcendent abstract idealism come to suggest the tools of a particular type of quixotic relationship with subjectively reified desires for assuring models of hierarchical knowledge and absolute moral verities. Something similar to Cervantes' methodology for revealing the schism between Don Quixote's subjective vision and the world it eclipses is apparent in both Clough's and Dostoevsky's depiction of the function which abstract ideology has in the reactions of a class of intellectuals and idealists, to uncertainties which pervade their identity, their worldly role, and their spiritual allegiances. In depicting it as such, both Clough and Dostoevsky dismantle the foundations of secular absolutism and expose the

²¹ My usage of the word 'distemper' throughout this thesis, draws on an epigram at the start of *Amours*: "Oh, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, / And taste with a distempered appetite!" (Clough - *Selected Poems*, 77; the quote is taken from *Twelfth Night*, I.v.89-90). The epigram reflects the distorting influence of fixed-ideas, such as Malvolio's self-love, on the fixated individuals' relationship with, and capacity to judge, ambivalent factual realities. Such fixations mediate individuals' attribution of ambivalent fact, affecting the way individuals perceive and react to it; the paramount importance such individuals ascribe to their fixed-idea consigns them to exist within a kind of false version of reality, which resists dimensions of actual reality and consequently deems it unpalatable. I mean 'distempered' to imply a state in which individuals' reactions to their surroundings, to other people, and to ambivalent facts are in some way negatively distorted by their fixation with, or commitment to, some ostensibly absolute and external code of general values. Where abstract idealists' abilities to register facts clearly is submerged beneath a fixation with the ultimate needfulness of absolutes, a distempered view of ambivalent reality as an outpost from the potent support of stable and credible abstractions often takes hold. This kind of distemper implies, then, a propensity to misapprehend reality or wrongly attribute the implications of ambivalent facts, which is determined by (and often indicative of) an idiosyncratic ideological perspective or worldview. Dipsychus' distempered palate, for example, is formed by his commitment to the kind of absolute assurances divine authority had seemed to provide. The effect of this distemper is apparent in his hostility to ambivalent reality, but more so in his adversarial relationship with whichever elements of reality thwart his desire to perceive the world as the home of his ideal.

influence of finite circumstance and individual preferences and desires which are encrypted and camouflaged within individuals' quixotic deference to secular ideals.²² It is this concern which defines the common ground between Clough and Dostoevsky. The same could perhaps be said of a good number of their contemporaries, and comparisons of more overt sympathies in manner are apparent, Clough and Turgenev, for instance, or Dostoevsky and Gissing. Between Clough and Dostoevsky, though, both the commonalities and their marked differences provide echoes and complements which fill-out, rather than simply reiterate, the profile of individuals gradually exposed to the inadequacy of their ideal.

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Clough's most productive period as a poet was in the initial years of his displacement from the sphere in which both his vocation and career path had seemed to lie. He resigned from his Oxford tutorship in April of 1848, and gave up his fellowship in October. In the time between he had begun *The Bothie* (1848), and in the following four years of travel and temporary employment wrote *Amours de Voyage* and *Dipsychus and The Spirit* (henceforth *Amours* and *Dipsychus* respectively). The initial enthusiasm of liberation evident in *The Bothie* does not last beyond the final extinction of the uprisings throughout 1848 and into 1849. The fortunes of republicanism, something of an emblem, perhaps, of the possibility of secular reform, sour leaving him, in the later poems of confusion and displacement, to sort through the postures and convictions of individual and communal purpose as a kind of *post mortem* of the extinct possibility of clear moral absolutes and life-goals.

In March of 1848, wearied by the last obligations of his tutorship, Clough wrote to J.C.Shairp: "If it were not for all these blessed revolutions, I should sink into

²² A clear denunciation of this kind of idealisation is apparent in Gogol's Petersburg tales; "The Overcoat" in particular gives a very clear depiction of the relationship with finite, synthetic, or worldly comforts which criticism of *secular Idealism* aims to ridicule. Akaky Akakievich, with nothing else in his life, invests his spiritual and personal love in his new coat. Though Akaky is a charmingly pathetic fool, Gogol is essentially mocking him and offering the reader his life as a travesty of the genuine dignity available in spirituality. Akaky is also a victim, though, and in his role in the bureaucratic and authoritarian department we can sympathise with him against the world that nurtured and exploits his travestied personality. As a ghost Akaky is far more spirited, attacking officials to deprive them of their warm coats, but he has nothing to lose, and there is still something pitiful about his fixation with the rank and privilege (and right to be warm) which defines eternity for him. Similarly, in Dostoevsky's short story "Bobok", a man asleep on a tombstone listens in on the petty bickering and social snobbery of the various corpses reposing in eternal rest beneath him. The eternal perpetuation of worldly squabbles travesties the afterlife's potency as an incentive to moral virtue through the guarantee of a better world to come. Through their grotesqueries of contemporary conventions and social values, both stories seem to

hopeless lethargy”.²³ To Tom Arnold he suggested that the failed revolution of June, 1848, might at least “accelerate change in England”.²⁴ The prospect of change consoled Clough for his personal ambivalence over career, duty, and prospects: “I am loose in the world and being just out of my old place, I am ready to look at every new place, and likely enough to go to none”.²⁵ The final revolutions of 1849 provide a backdrop to *Amours* in which the extinction of this optimism for change on a national scale is fused to a personal displacement from the terms of moral agreement and the possibilities of common recognition of any abstract moral order. Nevertheless, as the inadvertent *post mortem* of external authority, Clough’s sceptical uncertainty manages to remain sanguine and fertile, rather than hysterical or retrograde.

In their initial bereavement from old forms, Clough’s characters feel all the responsibility of relocating a cohesive moral frame and none of the liberation. Clough depicts a dysfunction of traditional tropes of noble altruism through their failure to meet the demands his characters’ make in their attempts to found absolute convictions on them. In the discord between received expectations and actual possibilities which emerges in this dysfunction, the obsolescence of the worldview these tropes had upheld and been empowered by is implicit, and the shadow such worldviews cast over ambivalence and ambiguity comes to suggest a disruptive anachronism.

Just as Clough’s acceptance of uncertainty illuminates aspects of the motivations which force Dostoevsky’s characters away from the possibility of stoic wit and into tragic delusion, the circumstances with which Dostoevsky’s characters struggle illuminate particular factors that allow Claude, for instance, to avoid absolute devotion to any secular ideology.

Dostoevsky began his literary career in the 1840s when aesthetes and thinkers were faced with the authoritarian repression of ‘Western’ liberalism in response to European unrest. By the time Dostoevsky returned from jail and then exile in Siberia, in 1849, the Russian authorities were becoming more lenient towards expressions of dissent in an attempt to placate calls for radical change by encouraging the perception (somewhat cynically) that they were embracing and expediting reform. After the Emancipation of the Peasants early in 1862, the perception of the traditional Tsarist system as an external

challenge the reader to reject the values he ascribes to contemporary ‘reality’ and commit to something higher than social status and transient gratification.

²³ Clough, *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough: With a Selection from His Letters and a Memoir*, ed. Blanche Clough (London & New York: Macmillan, 1888), 123.

²⁴ *Prose Remains*, 137.

²⁵ *Prose Remains*, 138.

order impervious to protest and opposition began to crumble. The presumption of the omnipotence of the state, and the stifling experience of the futile travail which had confined the idealistic anti-authoritarian criticism of the 1840s liberals to obscure allusiveness and abstraction, and a self-consoling, dreamy superfluity, gave way initially to an exaggerated belief in the new potency of populist political leverage.

To recall Stendhal's reflection on the political scenario facing those taking over power after Napoleon's Republic, the generation of idealists at this time look on their obligation not to *continue* but to *create*, with the additional luxury of considering themselves equipped with the knowledge and right to do so.

In Dostoevsky's work revolutionaries and rebels are punished for their adolescent egotism with a fervour that suggests, perhaps, his own need to mortify himself for his own transgression of the status quo. The missionary strategy of debunking idols by offending them short-circuits: Dostoevsky fell in with the Petrashevsky circle, adopted Belinsky's charismatic principles of reform through beauty and brotherhood, and found himself facing the firing squad. In the ensuing years of prison and army service (also a part of his sentence) Dostoevsky seems to respond to the suggestive cause and effect of his situation with an irascible often bombastic anathematisation of the pride and naïvete he associated with his own radicalism.

After his return from Siberia, the solipsistic idealists in Dostoevsky's work tend to participate in the world, pursuing active expressions of their inspirations in a desperate and explicit, but also naturalised, way. The repercussions of their disunity with reality are inflicted as a function of the chaos and suffering necessary to generate the emotional momentum for a repenting return to an order inherent in the reality which, under Dostoevsky's control, exudes this corrective intolerance of individualism.

Though I shall refer in passing to a wide range of Dostoevsky's work, *Notes from Underground* (1864) and *Crime and Punishment* (1866), provide the most salient depictions of the character type through which I intend to examine the relationship between abstract idealism and abstract uncertainties in the absence of God. In comparison to the broader canvas on which Dostoevsky explores related themes in *The Idiot* (1868), *Demons* (1872), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), these works offer relatively clear and distilled examples of his concerns.²⁶ The individual focus of *Notes*

²⁶ It might seem that my thesis would have been ideally served by focusing on *The Brothers Karamazov*. However, to do justice to this novel, in which Dostoevsky evokes so many facets of the social and individual implications of an increasing disjunction of religious faith and worldly conventions in modernising Russia, would have required a sacrifice of the broader scope I hope to achieve through

from *Underground* offers a useful point of progression from the journal-like self-portrait contained in Claude's letters to Eustace, and the at once more ambiguous and more overtly solipsistic internal dialogue of *Dipsychus*. *Crime and Punishment* then offers a situation in which the individualistic engagement with moral rights and responsibilities, while still highly focused on the subjective processes of supporting a solipsistic relation to the world, is shown to require the moulding influence and demands of inter-personal relationships and pressing social circumstances. The relative diffuseness of these kinds of moulding circumstance in Claude's and *Dipsychus*' isolation from domestic responsibility, is fundamental to the effect of Clough's work.

In close studies of *Amours* and *Dipsychus* I shall explore Clough's depiction of the effects of the loss of certainty on the individual. I shall show how Clough alludes to a credible secular role for abstract quests and consolations, by depicting the distempering influences of persisting standards of absolute certainty. With this influence in view, the status of these truths is anatomised as these characters seek to activate emotionally esteemed and intellectually imprinted assurances, and instead discover that the literal authority these assurances depend upon and perpetuate is obsolete. Having established this feeling of existing in a void of moral absolutes as a potential consequence of secular scepticism, I shall discuss *Crime and Punishment* as an active protest against what Dostoevsky sees as the moral confusion of secular absolutism. Beneath the various motivations for Raskolnikov's crime, it is his desperation to curtail an intractable uncertainty which provides him with the compulsion to compromise his awareness of reality's ambiguities, in the hope of precipitating conviction. The strategies with which Raskolnikov seeks to rationalise away his crime and his guilt, and to give his mortification the appearance of liberation, disparage precisely those finite human conventions he feels himself so desperately in need of. As I shall argue, this disparagement reflects the isolating compromises necessitated by attempts at sustaining essentially finite inspirations pertaining to the role of external moral authorities. Only

drawing specific inferences from a broader range of Dostoevsky's works, dealing more exclusively with some of the motivating concerns of my discussion of metaphysical uncertainty. Furthermore, though in many ways *The Brothers Karamazov* offers a kind of distillation or drawing together of the themes that preoccupied Dostoevsky throughout his work, I feel that in many of the earlier manifestations these themes, in their very formativeness, appear less the subject of what seems the more deliberate or resolved ideological stance of his final work.

in essentially hostile solipsisms, or monologues, can the individual maintain their secular image of the divine authority they feel deprived of.²⁷

Clough and Dostoevsky each presents an extreme and unique voice: Dostoevsky's attempts, through depictions of ostensibly normal reality, to induce or galvanise reactionary moral fervour involve the reader with the morbid disorientation of individuals who directly or indirectly attempt to transcend their moral bonds; while Clough, with his refusal to impose closure or certainty where it no longer seemed justified, writes with an anomalous facility for the unsullied depiction of the clash between uncertainty and a desire for order. Through this he demonstrates the pervasiveness of banal and fundamental, and therefore unavoidable, necessities of secular existence. In a sense, the perpetuation of absolutism which Dostoevsky's characters (and Dostoevsky) undertake are attempts to avoid acknowledging this banal situation.

The dilemma between upholding abstract ideals and consenting to the limitations of worldly commitments which Clough's characters typically recognise is approached from a position of literal remoteness from longstanding social ties. This approach, furthermore, is conducted in abstract and general terms which are free to find in Italian society, as they might in any alien culture, a social background in which commonly accepted conventions and values can be dissected as merely forms of the *idea* of community.

In Dostoevsky's work, though, similar dilemmas take place within an actual community of autonomous others to whom he gives the right to demand that recalcitrant individuals recognise kinds of obligations from which Claude and Dipsychus (initially) are physically and, to some extent, socially removed. Claude and Dipsychus are physically remote from the kind of duties which, for instance, gradually outweigh Myshkin's right and capacity to live by his ideal.²⁸

The individual crises attending Clough's characters' confrontation of uncertainty take place in circumstances which seem particularly conducive to open equivocation:

²⁷ In Myshkin's chaotic attempt to convey a benevolent new order, in *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky depicts the results of the stifling ambiguity engendered by the emotional particularity which underlies the overt gestures intended to convey individual secular certainties as if they were general truths.

It was my intention that a thorough discussion of the implications of Myshkin's attempt to purvey his ethic of compassion and openness would be included in this thesis as a point of contrast to Raskolnikov's more overtly individualistic attempt to reify his ideal. Unfortunately there simply was not enough space to do justice to this comparison; the influence of the problems raised in *The Idiot* nevertheless remains apparent in my discussion of *Crime and Punishment*, and aspects of Myshkin's character and role will be discussed throughout the thesis.

they are isolated from immediate responsibility (single, unemployed, tourists), and while individual anxiety remains, the social pressures are diffuse. Dostoevsky's alienated idealists are, in contrast, denied precisely the kind of recourse to "stoic epicureanism"²⁸ which Claude's circumstances allow him to cultivate.

The comic discrepancies which *Amours* and *Dipsychus* reveal at the heart of techniques through which desires for absolute comfort and consolation seek gratification in a recalcitrant reality, reappear in Dostoevsky's work as fractures capable of provoking extreme angst. These fractures arise from and attest to the frustration of idealists, generated by their perceptions of a dwindling tolerance, implicit in everyday conventions of truth, for the credibility of moral codes based in abstract values, or for the possibility of certainty beyond merely material concerns.

Abstracted Idealism – The Shadow of a Higher Duty

In the experiences of Clough's idealistic characters (confusions of isolation, abandonment and liberation), habits which had formed during periods of subservience to ostensibly authoritative abstract goals and values are anatomised in a way that reveals the particular needs and pretences that typically invest such abstractions with "external" authority. This 'anatomising' implies, furthermore, that the only credible or defensible codes of purpose and moral behaviour are particular and finite; conscious and considered responses to the coercion of abstract ideals by circumstance, which accept the limited options available in any actual moral choice as a prompt to decision rather than as a justification for idealistic disengagement from a non-Ideal world. In *Amours*, Claude is privileged with time and space enough to recognise the factitiousness of received models and terms of conviction, and the subjectivity and relativism of his relationship with them. The interactions of Clough's characters with the reality which their abstractions aim to order, reveal uncertainty as an ambivalent condition of the moral environment, its natural state, not a personal deficiency. In Dostoevsky's work, similar attitudes and desires are catalysed by psychological and social necessities in such a way that the characters affiliated with these attitudes feel encouraged, even compelled, to act out the agendas these affiliations provide as if they were external certainties rather than externalised expressions of desire.

²⁸ The ethic through which Myshkin tries to live better than others, his ideal of compassion, is generated in a similar state of abstraction and isolation from the awkward realities of human interaction. When this ethic is forced to engage with these realities the limitations of its abstract inception begin to tell against it.

Through my focus on the types of self-representation and habits of interaction with other people which habitually accompany idealists' self-conscious affiliation with a higher authority, I seek to explore an impression that the persuasive potency and emotional energy of idealism and ideologies (both for individuals and as an evangelised creed) is generated by underlying fixations beneath their explicit concerns. The compelling prestige of this 'language', therefore, is not inspired by qualities inherent in the abstractions it invokes, but in the indirect expression of personal and emotional orientation they provide to those who make use of them. This relationship is simultaneously disguised and indulged by the formal implications of the terms of abstract discourse. Through their use of abstractions the characters and people I refer to attempt to make their personal desires and expectations seem objective and universal (in a manner compelling to themselves as well as others). Consequently, their personal preferences appear in variously subtle guises as absolute principles, allowing them to act as if in accord with an external authority. For the individual who constructs or approves them, subjective ideals and the ideological attitudes which they promote have the same appeal and function as more directly social or political directives. Julien Sorel, in Stendhal's *Scarlet and Black*, approves and imitates Rousseau's "horror of eating with servants", due to the role of *The Confessions* in helping "his imagination to form a picture of society" (*Scarlet and Black*, 40). Julien is drawn to the convenient ready-made construct of propriety (interpreted from Rousseau's "picture") with a feeling of vindicating his distaste for his present position and with the thrill of recognising a viable and estimable framework of conduct in the aspirations this picture encourages. A similar disgruntled alienation is apparent also in the purportedly rational and sceptical scrutiny which determines the discourse and conduct of absolute idealists struggling to regenerate a rational founding framework for their esteemed individual association with abstract moral propriety. The unwillingness to accept the purely material world as the sole resource of moral precepts and value judgements, generates a class of individuals who conduct their discourse and campaigns with an equal thrill of vindication and enthusiasm.

I shall therefore be exploring ideological formulations as a type of idiom, indirectly affirming subjectively privileged attitudes, rather than as systematic propositions to be evaluated abstractly in terms of their feasibility or otherwise.

In confronting uncertainty and ideological and moral ambiguities, Dostoevsky and Clough both depict, both deliberately and unwittingly, potential avenues of advance in

the conception of idealism's role as a mode of solely human expression, and the limitations this role simultaneously imposes.

In my discussion of these characters' typical habits of abstract interpretation and expression of their responsibilities to reality, and of the 'reality' they envisage in response, the revealing interrelation between expression, circumstance and effect (particularly the discrepancy between desired and actual effects) will therefore play a major part.

The confusions inherent in the language and attitudes which sustain the 'prestige' of transcendent ideals, do not originate in cultural or even denominational particularities, but reflect, rather, the disrupted metaphysical context which had initially invested certain terms and attitudes with an otherworldly significance. Ultimately, the trauma of this disruption is founded in a modern "Western" spiritual self-conception, rather than in particular dispensations of the Russian or English, French or German language and culture. The tension between desired patterns of certainty and a reality which lacks any unimpeachable authority to sanction them, manifests in difficulties, partly of language, but essentially of self-expression and cogent communication of subjective moral positions. The strategies through which these characters can be seen to circumvent or rationalise these difficulties reveal the problematic relationship to external reality, which is engendered by secular "truths" that aim to efface the traces and implications of the finite human expression which is their essence.

Esteem for the potentially fertile role of abstract ideals implies approval of the benefits attainable through altruistically self-imposed responsibilities. The symbolic absolutes to which these responsibilities metaphorically defer are activated by this devotion; although considered real, they are plainly incapable of imposing on real life in the way an omnipotent God could. This act of self-resignation to abstract ideals also offers an active feeling of allegiance to a disparate community of similarly initiate individuals, real or imaginary, alive or dead.²⁹ The ability or intention to sustain a faith in something beyond material circumstance (be it through independence from or

²⁹ It is perceptions of this kind of shared devotion which encourage reflective and introspective individuals' feelings of identification and intimacy with figures they are acquainted with merely through the figures' history or their works: as Stendhal's Julien Sorel took his cues from the writings of Rousseau; so Goethe identified and sympathised with Montaigne; for both Julien and Goethe these influences involve more than just intellectual approval or agreement, they include an emotional attachment through which these individuals claim the authors as their peers. Goethe observes in his autobiography that "Montaigne, Amyot, Rabelais, Marot, were my friends, and excited in me sympathy and delight" (*The Autobiography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, volume II*, transl. John Oxenford (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 97).

compromise with social reality) becomes a source of pride.³⁰ To the individuals involved, this “ability” often comes to suggest a calling and an esoteric mark of distinction, and therein, a potential source of distorting affectation. The significance invested in the capacity (and need) for faith is suggestive of a kind of indoctrinated reverence for the service of a higher purpose: whether as a military officer, a ship’s captain, a clergyman, a scientist, or a Rugby School prefect, a pseudo-aristocratic burden of honourable conduct becomes interwoven with standards of personal dignity and belonging. The capacity of these individuals to sustain their devotion to an abstract moral code becomes a standard against which they measure and affirm their self esteem and their worthiness of abstract duty.

I do not intend to suggest that such codes are *intrinsically* dangerous or untenable, but merely that they become so when their authority is accepted uncritically to the extent of denying or neglecting good reasons to temper their directives. There are of course a variety of reasons for individuals’ dependence in this fashion, but the consequences can be organised into a common pattern: the inability to acknowledge elements of experience and fact that contradict the terms of the code on which these individuals depend, results in a compromised relationship with reality and others (a compromise which tells in their thinking and actions).³¹

Abstract idealism permits individuals the self-perception of a kind of chivalric brotherhood, elevated from the conventional forms that bind the community in which they exist, and providing an ostensibly disinterested abstract standard against which the absolute value of these conventional forms can be measured and, typically, criticised.

³⁰ I shall explore this dimension further in Chapter 5 - “A Dignified Occupation”.

³¹ The idealist’s feelings of homelessness amidst the merely pragmatic contingencies of worldliness can also reflect a proud posture of resistance to self-interest and material motivation; a posture of protest against what are felt to be the wider community’s abuses of abstract virtues. The role of any idea capable of providing individuals or groups with reasons to oppose material conventions is a potential source of dissent and disruption. Idealism sustains the kind of irrational sacrifices necessary to disruptions of *status quo* and individuals’ self-interest. For example, in Griboyédov’s *Chatsky* or *The Misery of Having a Mind* (1823) (*The Government Inspector and Other Russian Plays: Fonvizin: The Infant; Griboyédov: Chatsky; Gógol: The Government Inspector; Ostróvsky: Thunder*, transl. Joshua Cooper; 1972, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1990), 125-213), the self-imposed exile of the titular hero acts out his conviction that the critical intellect is superfluous in a world of blind conformity and material determinism: “I’ve gone to search the world, / To find some niche, where outraged sense can shelter!” (*Chatsky*, Act 4, 211). *Chatsky*’s “outraged sense” reflects his feeling that living heritage has been replaced by an appropriated and superficial culture. Such complaints invoke idealised standards (in varied forms, such as disinterested rationalism, communism, or the return to the soil) to authorise and bolster a criticism of a self-aggrandising culture of hypocrisy and formalised delusion. (Alexander Griboyédov was a contemporary of Alexander Pushkin; in 1825 he was arrested in the wake of the Decembrist Uprising, but eventually was cleared of any seditious activity and released.) Dostoevsky’s various characterisations (in *Notes from Underground* and “White Nights” (1846), for example) of Petersburg as an artificial or premeditated city, produced from ephemera, founded on ephemera and potentially at any moment to go the way of ephemera, express a similarly uneasy response to urban modernity.

In this self-perception, the sometimes quixotic heroes of cultural criticism evince the sort of spiritual pride which so readily disrupts their commitment to disinterested scepticism.

The realm of abstract thought often comes to suggest to the idealist their natural element, both their calling and their place (or “home”), and though its consolations are undeniable they are seductive and isolating.

For example, as Arkady Dolgoruky, in Dostoevsky’s *An Accidental Family* (1875), reflects, “My idea is the corner I live in”;³² he observes also that his loyalty to this “corner”, and to justifying its “reality” at the expense of fact if need be, is all-consuming: “I just can’t live among people – that’s what I think now and I’ll say the same thing in forty years”.³³ Arkady (much like Raskolnikov) nurtures the authority of his idea through isolation, and ultimately finds himself imprisoned within this solitude and within a sterile charade of the desired self-image it allows him to sustain.³⁴ Just as an idea provides Arkady with his own ‘place’ (his corner), strict fidelity to the ‘ideas’ on which they are emotionally dependent often incarcerates abstract idealists in a ‘necessary’ isolation.

In a similar way to that in which Arkady’s devotion to his idea reifies it as a shelter from an unsatisfying reality, the emotional relationships individuals form with their “ideas” can reify them as comrades. Steeped in the psychology of attachment, loss and emotional (not merely intellectual) uncertainty, these relationships can become sources of genuine feelings of pleasure, belonging and comfort.

The majority of individuals who depend on these feelings, though, are also aware that they deviate from conventional or communal patterns of emotional life. Hence the tendency to seek out peers, or form friendships with others capable at least of understanding the literal meaning of their enthusiasms.³⁵ The poetry and inclusiveness

³² Dostoevsky, *An Accidental Family*, trans. Richard Freeborn (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 58. This work has also been translated under the titles *A Raw Youth*, and *The Adolescent*.

³³ *An Accidental Family*, 58.

³⁴ Predominantly, Arkady’s dependence on the notion that his life is intrinsically an act of devotion to an abstract ideal, allows him to maintain a good opinion of himself, regardless of his actions. “The main thing was”, he admits, “that I always had an excuse. No matter how much I upset my mother at this time, or how shamefully I neglected my sister, I would always tell myself: ‘Well, I have my “Idea” and everything else is nonsense.’ If I were ever told off – and badly told off at that – I would go away feeling humiliated and later I’d suddenly say to myself: ‘Oh, I may be a low down bastard, but I’ve still got my “Idea” and they know nothing about that.’ ” (*An Accidental Family*, 101).

³⁵ In *Crime and Punishment* this kind of attraction is apparent between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov: they are each drawn to the other in the hope of establishing a sympathetic bond of transgressive disdain for conventional morality. Similarly, in *Demons*, the members of Pyotr Verkhovensky’s insurgent cell are bound solely by the fact of their insurgent relationship with convention; beyond this relationship their actual systems of belief are various and personal. The nature of this bond reflects a common pattern in the critical and abstract community: their orientation to reality, rather than any particular common conclusion, is the fundamental distinguishing factor.

of the coven of abstract devotees is attainable simply by awareness and sympathy; as ideas, its iconic figureheads and virtues, are potentially accessible by anyone.³⁶

In *Amours*, Mary Trevellyn reflects that Claude speaks of ideas with vitality: “it is but when he talks of ideas, / That he is quite unaffected, and free, and expansive, and easy;” (III.i.32-33). This is not simply the sign of a “cold intellectual” dissector of emotions (III.i.34), it is the enthusiasm for an adopted mother tongue, the pleasure at being invited to move in the realm associated with proud self-esteem and a capacity to engage with others. Though it gives the impression of a lack of sympathy and aloofness (quite deliberately) from surface manners and simple chatter, Claude’s preferred idiom is not esteemed by him solely for its abstractness and devotion to profound thought, it is also, for Claude, a far more familiar and emotionally gratifying mode of interaction. Talk “of ideas” affords Claude a secure foundation which offers him a means of attempting to establish a rapport with the Trevellyns from a position of personal confidence. Rather than abstraction itself being intrinsically inhibiting, though, it is the dependence on the familiar security of his preferred attitudes which keeps Claude from surrendering to spontaneous interaction. The tendency to abstract individual experiences from their particularity allows individuals to distance emotion and, in generalising personal desires, pains and obligations, also forestalls decisive individual engagement. Claude’s rarefied language and abstracted reflections, though, in their very ongoing-ness and thematic fixations show their incapacity to quiet the uncertainty and anxiety that provokes their attempts to impose order. Because his critical idiom is still a register, or language, of personal circumstance and individual confusion, Claude cannot efface the decisive awareness that this curiously ambivalent state relates to him. While seeming somehow external to him, the void of absolutes (the ambivalent world) requires his personal collaboration with his particular circumstances to both learn and engage with finite moral directives.

Later in this thesis I shall focus on Dostoevsky’s representations of these almost reified relationships with ideas and abstract systems, wherein abstract subjective “ideals” come to play the part of real external presences in individuals’ lives, rather than remaining as gestures or symbols which the individual uses, controls and originates.

³⁶ Dostoevsky’s description of a revolutionary’s raided apartment, in *Demons*, clearly points up the utilisation of secular ideas and thinkers in the role of iconic totems. The revolutionary has smashed his landlord’s icon with an axe (*Demons*, transl. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994), 346). In arranging three books, by Vogt, Moleschott and Büchner (all scientific rational positivists), as secular symbols for iconic veneration, the religiosity of his revolutionary iconoclasm attests to a reactionary dependence on the rituals of prestige belonging to the structures it opposes. While implications of subversive parody are available (both by or of the revolutionary), the revolutionary’s surrogate icons seem to suggest a spontaneous and intrinsic dependence on the pattern of subordination,

I do not intend in focusing on these various characters to reduce them to a common explanation of their habits and their recourse to abstraction. I aim, rather, to signal the fact of this significant common recourse to abstract idealism, and by exploring the nature of this fact, to show both how idealistic intellectuals *desire* to react to a circumstance of pervasive uncertainty, and how they are legitimately able to do so, and the tension between the two. I shall be exploring idealism, therefore, in relation to its formulation and justification by individuals who are dependent, in one way or another, on validating a relationship to a higher knowledge in order to curtail the pain of uncertainty and undirected choice. This exploration is not undertaken as an evaluation of the validity of the various ideals as philosophical positions, but rather to suggest a common pattern in the interaction between intellect, emotion, and psychology, which underlies these particular expressions. Registering this pattern suggests a means to interpret and understand the deliberate and indirect portrayals of the role of idealism in expressing the disorientation of individuals committed to moral quests in a period which is essentially the dawn of widespread secular moral relativism. Idealism and abstraction become recourses for expressions of the loss of co-ordinates rather than a fertile resource of systems and projects for their reintroduction.

In spite of their differences, these characters have in common their involvement with the problems of utilizing abstraction as a medium of individual discourse and orientation to their community. The subsequent consciousness of a divide between desire and reality (relating to self and the world) leads to parallel experiences of displacement and superfluity. In relation to these experiences, extremes of non-conformity, such as revolution or withdrawal, are equally representative of strategies with which particular individuals cope with the dispersal of certainty, and the undermining of an esteemed code of conduct.

To this end, my focus is on characters' use of abstract and transcendent idealism as a privileged tool, the circumstances in which they apply this tool, and the role which their desiring emotional selves play as both superintendent and conduit of the "objective" idealistic discourse they crave. The characters' relationships with reality are depicted alongside a reality in which their authors enable the reader to recognise discrepancies between individualistic images both of reality and of self, and the actual circumstances to which these are a response.

of which the ideological opposition between the materialist doctrines represented by the new icons and the spiritual doctrine it replaces hides an essentially similar practice.

In depicting the undesirable consequences that often arise from the passionate intensity which sustains these individualistic images, there is often an ambiguous moralistic reinforcement of the *status quo*. It is effected through a kind of narrative backlash, unintentional at times no doubt, which, in castigating the particular consequences precipitated by an individual's actions seems at the same time to recommend or endorse the conservative stasis which these actions transgress. I am aware that my own criticisms of idealistic absolutism may at times suffer from a similar backlash. This is unintended and undesirable. My criticisms are aimed at demonstrating the particular manner which absolutism (deprived of divine foundations) imposes on idealistic impulses, and exploring the postures its weight forces individuals to adopt in order to sustain a feeling of fidelity to their ideals. Unto themselves these impulses suggest estimable attempts to engage in a disinterested constructive criticism of humanity's position in the world and individuals' relationship to other individuals. As far as I have any ideological intent, then, it is rather to demonstrate that the disrepute into which this kind of abstract posture so often falls (both when it precipitates action and when it fails to) is a reflection of the distempering expectations which intellectual and emotional habits of absolutism lead idealists to impose on their own ideals.

It is a fundamental presumption of my thesis that intellectual idealism is a valuable activity. The criticism I may at times appear to heap on its devotees is rather to expose particular inherited habits that appear to corrupt this activity, and bind it unnecessarily to unhappy and often destructive results.

In the cases I shall examine, I hope to show that idealism involves choices and preferences for which the individual idealist is always ultimately accountable, but which they often seek to deflect onto impersonal objective principles. I hope also to suggest that the problems idealists often experience in a world of ambivalent facts which intrinsically opposes any single and absolute ideal, typically stem from their desire to avoid (by surrendering to the idea of a higher authority) a burdensome responsibility to accept that they are themselves *making choices* from the midst of various and conflicting 'moral' impulses.³⁷

³⁷ In the absence of any absolute authority, idealism requires conscious sacrifices and compromises, and cannot provide a template for *unimpeachable* moral conduct. Where individual responsibility for approving a particular ideal is admitted, so that any negative or uncomfortable consequences are expected and accepted beforehand, these problems might be avoided. This is not pragmatism under the name of idealism, but merely a pragmatic approach to the role of idealism. It is an approach that might enable idealists to avoid the dissatisfaction and disillusion which so often sours a commitment to principles which, though not ideal, are in themselves worth the reverence the idealist feels for them (as is the case with Dipsychus).

This implied distinction, between pragmatic idealism and absolute idealism, also suggests the resilience (and desirability) of idealism that accepts its foundation in protest and its bond to a finite

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Two terms I am using to denote particular habitual responses to uncertainty are the ‘faustian compromise’ and the ‘unpregnant pause’. These terms refer to particular patterns into which the consequences of individual confrontations with the limitations imposed by uncertainty appear to fall. I shall briefly explain these terms here, and then again in greater detail in the chapter “Framework”. The names I have given to these patterns are suggested by the habits of identification utilised both deliberately and unwittingly by these characters, and similarly, therefore, by the authors who depict them.³⁸ However, the terms as I use them will also come gradually to emphasise some implicit patterns and implications within these tropes of the intellectual, emotional and moral impact of seeking moral absolutes and finding only uncertainty. The faustian compromise relates to a circumstance of wilful action undertaken *as if* with a foundation of certainty, in rebellion against what is unwittingly recognised as a circumstance of legitimate ambiguity. The unpregnant pause, drawing on the particular attraction Hamlet held for many of the characters I shall be discussing, reflects the inability to act in response to an intractable registering of relativism and confusion.

The ostensibly unlikely pairing of Clough’s and Dostoevsky’s work offers a fruitful contrast through which the essential contingency of this language of transcendent abstractions can be made apparent.

Identifying Clough with the unpregnant pause, and Dostoevsky with the faustian compromise, serves to clarify the conditions under which these two radically dissimilar authors offer striking elaborations of an either/or of the options open to abstract idealists in an atmosphere of contestable moral authority. The dubious foundations of secular conviction are ultimately apparent in the uncommitted non-ideology of Clough’s work. In Dostoevsky’s work this dubiousness is proclaimed through the consequences of his characters’ application of their individualistic and secular convictions to reality. These applications are conducted in a manner which, while supported and promoted by the habitual patterns of their formulation, they are essentially incapable of sustaining without resorting to a selective relationship to their actual consequences. In *Dipsychus*, Clough depicts the emotional persuasions typical of faustian compromises, and in

criticism of particular discontents, and does not seek or depend on the moral superintendence of an external sanction.

Dostoevsky the problematic conditions of the unpregnant pause are implicit in his disparagement of secular ideology. Having established the dilemma of esteeming once-authoritative absolutes in the clarity of abstraction afforded by Clough's non-ideology, I shall explore the role of secular absolutism in Dostoevsky's work as the inappropriate foundations of idealistic commitment.

The conditions which promote the faustian compromise are heightened in Dostoevsky's Russia but exist wherever the necessity of acting out of a desire for certainty, and in the hope of thereby *precipitating* the desired *conviction*, is more compelling than the need to acknowledge the legitimate ambiguity that undermines any formulation of absolute conviction. Moral choices are intellectually laid out before Clough's characters with no externally compelling need to make one: to do so then becomes an act of conscience and, potentially, of subjective self-solacing. As much as discovering the reliance of conviction and self-sacrifice in the name of conviction on ambiguous and emotive arguments, Claude, in *Amours*, discovers an inability to react genuinely to these emotive models from the transience which is a fundamental part of both his intellectual plasticity and his physical and cultural remoteness.

The unpregnant pause reflects a privileged position of freedom from (or imperviousness to) immediate obligation, and a freedom therefore from any circumstances which directly accuse it of negligently over-scrupulous moral fastidiousness (an accusation which, as I shall discuss later, The Spirit levels relentlessly at Dipsychus' devotion to abstract ideals). The dreamer, as Dostoevsky portrays this type in his earliest fiction, is deprived of the privilege of such negligence. Rather than committing themselves to reify their desired reality by acting as if it were real, or sacrificing it in deference to what is perceived as an unpleasant reality, the dreamers indulge passively in a dual existence of solipsistically approved artifice. Their dreams are segregated from the compromises their real situation demands of them (such as mundane employment, living within their means etc.), and esteemed as the reality more suited to their personal measure of their self-worth and entitlements.

Unlike "dreamers", faustian activists in the service of a "new word" seek to support ideas and interpretations which are ostensibly capable of affirming their particular ideal as a reality which exists as much for others as it does for them. Rather than retreating into solipsism (after the disorientation that ensues in the loss of a divine

³⁸ In depicting these habits of identification, authors' motivations can vary from naturalistic registering of a specimen to sympathetic approval of the character type, or the critical interpretation of the emotional

authority, for example), these active idealists act out their individual need for order as a general and public concern. The two types share a fundamental esteem for their individually approved versions of an ideal order but the active idealists feel compelled to impose this esteemed vision on actual reality and, therefore, other people.

CHAPTER 2 – Framework

Apparatus Briefly

To describe some patterns in the relationships which these characters form with abstract attitudes and systems I shall be using a framework of terms which, though probably familiar to the reader, will be used to designate particular meanings in this thesis. I shall here give a brief introduction to these terms before dealing with them individually.

“Emotivism” is a term I have borrowed from Alasdair MacIntyre’s special redefinition, in *After Virtue*, of the philosophy of Moore, Stevenson, Duncan and Ramsey. I shall explain this relationship in more detail shortly, and expand on it in my argument. Similarly, “monologue” is a term which unavoidably evokes Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the significance of monologic and dialogic authority and their relation, respectively, to worldviews he distinguishes as epic and novelistic. My own usage of monologue has parallels with Bakhtin but I am not employing it as a Bakhtinian term; the differences in my usage of the term will be explored in the section “Emotivism and Monologues”.

I am using the notion of little-fausts and little-hamlets, and, respectively, their characteristic compromises for the sake of action and their unpregnant pauses, to suggest two patterns of response to individual feelings of having been deprived of cogent moral proofs and abstract convictions.¹ Both these reactions are prompted by a

¹ The little-hamlet (*gamletik* in Russian) we have already met in Shubin’s self-diagnosis as a representative of the superfluous generation of Russian intelligentsia to which he belongs. The little-hamlet was a particularly popular trope of intellectual disaffection and discontent in mid nineteenth-century Russia, as it was throughout Europe. The hero of Tennyson’s *Maud* also refers to himself as a little hamlet, but it is by behaviour, rather than specific self-identification, that most of the little-hamlets reveal their shared status.

“Faustuli” (little-faust), is the name under which Dipsychus’ character, and his part in the dialogue with The Spirit, developed in Clough’s manuscripts. Again, it is a convenient name for the pattern of behaviour that I shall explain further in the body of this thesis. Both terms incorporate diminutive implications, which reflect a kind of trickle-down process of identification wherein a large population of educated but predominantly anonymous individuals feel justified in making sense of their circumstance by identifying with parallel elements in the situation, decisions and fate of these grandiose intellectual heroes. In *The Proud Knowledge: Poetry, Insight and the Self, 1620-1920* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), John Holloway notes similarly that as “Faust the Little”, Dipsychus has “shrunk from the stature of heroic enquirer and seeker to that of diminutive manikin, all doubt and hesitation” (149). Characters such as Faust, Hamlet and Don Quixote offered (and still offer) evocative emblems of certain types of behaviour, or habits of thought (much as Napoleon did), which were available to the ever increasing population of literate middle class aspirants, to dignify the analogy these individuals felt to exist between their own and their heroes’ challenges and qualities.

Matthew Arnold’s allusive complaint (in the preface to his collected poems in 1853) that, in the fragments of the philosopher Empedocles, “the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves, we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of

paramount desire for a clear moral authority: the little-hamlets refuse to act except in the name of an authoritative conviction, and will not tamper with uncertainty to convince themselves of its existence; the little-fausts *act*, be it on their idea of the world or on the world itself, in order to make the world ostensibly comply with the conditions necessary for the absolute credibility of their subjective conviction. Primarily, though, the experiences of the little-fausts are distinguished by the subsequent reactions to this action, through which they seek to evade the failures of their proposed absolute and are exposed in the capricious compromise on which it had been founded.

In the characters of Hamlet and Don Quixote, Ivan Turgenev perceived “the twin antitypes of human nature,” rhetorically pondering: “Do not all men belong more or less to one type or the other?”² Turgenev’s over-generalisation is blatant; nevertheless in his complaint that his own time is marked by rather more Hamlets than Don Quixotes, the characters are formed into Turgenev’s own symbols of a contrasting relationship between irony and faith. For Turgenev the proliferation of ironic self-awareness and the apparently overwhelming (though perhaps circumstantial) evidence linking it to over-scrupulous, and therefore interminable, equivocation seems to confer on quixotic behaviour the prestige of a rare determination to reify idealism and live in complete subjection to it.³

The Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky saw in Hamlet a reflection of the introspective idealist mindset, which he juxtaposed with the mature and worldly life-of-the-mind of Faust.⁴ Though Belinsky’s response to Faust, like Turgenev’s to Don

Hamlet and of Faust”, further accentuates the fertile status of these two characters as points of reference, identification and self-definition (“Preface to the First Edition of *Poems* (1853)”, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allot (London: Longmans, 1965), Appendix A, 589-609, 591). Arnold felt his interpretation of Empedocles’ despairing state of mind, in “Empedocles on Aetna” had become inappropriate for the contemporary intellectual scene, in which he felt it stood as a dangerous affirmation of its least worthy traits. Consequently, the poem, as explained in the 1853 preface, was ceremonially excluded from a volume of Arnold’s collected works.

² Ivan Turgenev, *Hamlet and Don Quixote*, trans. Robert Nichols (London: Hendersons, 1930), 11.

³ The desire for a correction to the ‘imbalance’ generated by the proliferation of scepticism stimulates Turgenev’s rather extravagant idealisation of the alternative “antitype” and the remedy of faith which Don Quixote’s idealism appears to him to represent: Quixote becomes a great and humble hero, whose one goal is “to establish the triumph of truth and reign of justice upon earth” (*Hamlet and Don Quixote*, 13). In Prince Myshkin’s development throughout *The Idiot* one could see a desire to redress this same imbalance, stifled by the reality of an atmosphere inhospitable to proofs of faith. From the holy fool naïvete of “the knight of the sad countenance”, Myshkin’s experience of an imperviously ambivalent reality delivers him into the morass of the double mind. Turgenev’s criticism, itself subject to the cultural phenomenon of which he writes, shows signs of an Individualism which, in terms similar to McGann’s distinction, in *The Romantic Ideology*, between Romantic practice and Romantic Ideology (Romanticism), exists as a symptom of uncritical approval or allegiance to the predicates it examines.

⁴ In “Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (1835), the Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky used Hamlet and Faust to distinguish a seeking in the world and a seeking in the self for the harmonious affirmation of idealism

Quixote, romanticises him almost out of recognition, he brings them together as counterpoints in the explanation of a type, rather than as twin antitypes of human nature. The little-hamlets and little-fausts take shape in the self-defining responses of idealists to reality's resistance to the forms of their ideals. In contrast to the Quixotic image of singular action sanctified by individual faith, the consequences of Faust's disappointed and distempered idealism render him an emblem of the fate of secular decisiveness compelled by the strategic image of absolute certainty. The unpregnant pause of the *gamletik* reflects an environment shared by, and factitiously resolved in, the faustian compromise.⁵

(Allen & Clark, *Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962), 442-48).

Writing on the nineteenth-century Russian dissident author Alexander Herzen, Isaiah Berlin refers briefly to a character in Herzen's *Who Is To Blame?* as a "prototype" of the "Russian Hamlet" (see "A Revolutionary Without Fanaticism", *The Power of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2001), 88-102). A familiar figure in the novels also of Goncharov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev, the "Russian Hamlet" is "too idealistic and too honest to accept the squalor and the lies of conventional society; too weak and too civilised to work effectively for their destruction, and consequently displaced from his proper function and doomed to poison his own life and the lives of others by neurotic behaviour" (*The Power of Ideas*, 90).

In other writings on the role of the intelligentsia, particularly in nineteenth-century Russia, Berlin elaborates on the unusual role ideas played in Russian intellectual history. Berlin attributes the tendency among nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals towards reifying abstract theories and intellectual systems (a tendency he represents as in some way determined as a kind of national mentality) to an enthusiastic faith in the attainability of generalised ideals and absolutes. Ideological activity was inherently geared, therefore, to the attainment of an actual endpoint (the truth, or the best truth, for instance), and ideological inspirations, accordingly, were frequently mistaken, misrepresented, and misused as natural laws (like the law of gravity). See also Berlin's "Russian Intellectual History" (*The Power of Ideas*, 68-78), and "The Role of the Intelligentsia" (*The Power of Ideas*, 103-10). Towards the end of the nineteenth century the figure persists in Anton Chekhov's plays and stories; in the superfluous and self loathing Ivanov (in *Ivanov*), for example, and the young aesthete, Kostia Trepliov, whose suicide brings *The Seagull* to its close.

⁵ The *gamletiks* that proliferate throughout Turgenev's fiction share an almost ubiquitous deference (half envy, half disdain) to men of action, and to the semblance of conviction that adheres to their activities. These men of action suggest characters whose devotion to a cause indicates a vitality and determination which inevitably also wins them the intellectual's or aesthete's cherished (from afar) ideal love. In *On the Eve*, *Smoke*, and *Virgin Soil* a similar pattern of almost willed, and certainly approved, romantic failure sees the hero's female counterpart, a worthy help-meet, won from the aesthete by the man of action. The aesthetes' approval acknowledges a sense that their own practical or domestic ineptitude would ultimately mark their partnership with this help-meet as a negligent misappropriation of an otherwise useful contributor to the common good. In Ivan Goncharov's *Oblomov* this conscientious bachelorhood is imposed on Ilya Oblomov and approved by him in recognition of the incurable indolence that attends his day-dreaming detachment from real life. The natural partner of the "hero", as suggested by conventions of romance, marries the efficient German instead, and together they reflect sadly on Oblomov's continued dissipation, with parental tenderness and despair. In this deviation of focus from the standard order of romantic plot (an order which, were it desired, could have been salvaged by redirecting the reader's interest to the effective couple) the disruptive presence of the antihero is formulaically laid out. Oblomov's negligence, his isolation, his aversion to change, and his disproportionate love of his cloistered certainties, are all apparent in this marginalisation from his traditional social (and literary) obligations. In *Virgin Soil*, and in Chernyyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*, the self-conscious abstract idealists, Nejdakov and Lopukhov respectively, have won their ideal female counterparts (refined, emancipated and committed), but each conscientiously surrenders them to the men of action, to whom the women, they supposed, are better suited. Nejdakov extends the surrender of his own interests to that of his "cause" by surrendering his life: he commits suicide to blot out and curtail his failure to live up to his ideal. Nejdakov's inability to become "simplified" is a repudiation of his most cherished ideas which he cannot abide. The commonplace naïvete and ambiguous altruism that

The faustian compromise entails a situation in which individuals attempt to arrogate to themselves, or to their subjectively affirmed ideals, the absolute authority of an external or supernatural creator, and (more importantly perhaps) the consequences of these attempts in which the delusions that the pursuit of absolutes thrives on and attempts to perpetuate are revealed. The faustian situation is not one of power corrupting but rather of power wrongly apportioned. The decisiveness and commitment of faustian activity bases itself on a presumption of absolute certainty, the absence of which is evinced in the unpregnant pause of the *gamletiki*. Faust shares Don Quixote's determination to subject the world to a willed ideal, but is further seduced by the supernatural power Mephistopheles makes available to him and his conviction in his authority to wield it over reality. Faust's capacity to take protean control of an otherwise dissatisfying reality allows him to reify his fabricated ideological rightness as the defining truth of a shared reality, and to demonstrate an aggressive sociopathic tendency which, in Don Quixote's devotions, cannot graduate from the lonely and pitiable self-dependence of merely interior idealism. In a sense the faustian compromise, as utilised by Goethe and Clough, is quite in harmony with the implication's of Don Quixote's delusions prior to the essentially Romantic tendency to idealise Quixote's individualistic 'triumph' over the merely actual world.⁶ Don Quixote is mostly pitiful, isolated and, ultimately, a disappointed denouncer of his own surrender to fancy; he does not share in Cervantes' comedy of the vainglory of idealistic vision, he is its unwitting butt. Neither Don Quixote, Faust, nor Dipsychus the faustuli, acknowledge personal *choice* in their "fated" role: Don Quixote is "inspired", Faust entitled and Dipsychus compelled. Though the commitments of each are founded on personal desire all three can be seen to evade, through the implied presence of absolute forces determining the propriety of their actions, the personal accountability which acknowledging this personal element would invite.

In an atmosphere of moral relativism, the faith and devotion of Don Quixote amounts to delusion, while Faust's committed activism involves him recurrently in reburying the vestiges of prematurely solved uncertainties under ritualised affirmations

saw the Russian countryside flooded with *narodniks* (students and intellectuals who espoused simplification and went to live like peasants, upholding their idealised versions of unspoiled rural traditions) like Nejdánov, are equally evident in the bankruptcy of imagination and hope, or narrowness of purpose, which determines that suicide is his only alternative. Turgenev's tacit approval of the barren fate of his superfluous men mirrors their own reactionary approval of their unworthiness and social irrelevance.

⁶ For a more comprehensive articulation of the evolution of critical interpretations and individual responses to the figure of Don Quixote see the chapters on Don Quixote in Ian Watt's *Myths of Modern Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

of the absolute propriety of his personal inspirations. There are recognisably quixotic elements in Faust's characteristic compromise, but an underlying awareness of the conditions which generate the unpregnant pause, reflects the tension which intellectual penetration and critical rigour generate with specific expectations and desires for a lucid and absolute outcome to this devotion to knowledge. The unpregnant pause and the faustian compromise reflect two distorting effects of an anachronistic esteem for external certainties. They are haunted by their inability to admit finite inspiration as the inevitable foundation of the absolutist moral framework they crave.

These tropes, embracing isolation, imprisonment, superfluity and displacement, reflect a condition of unwitting excommunication from the collaborative discourse of moral interaction in deference to a solipsism approved as an abstract authority. The unpregnant pause accepts, often unhappily, a sceptical endurance of uncertainty and therein holds at least the prospect of evolving a progressive perspective of idealism as a personal expression, relating to character and circumstance and the relationship between the two.

Admitting Uncertainty

Moral scepticism implies a critical overview of the moral plane as a realm of abundant and equal possibilities. Moral choices can be made for good, or at least satisfactory, reasons but the presence of alternative choices, regardless, requires individuals to accept responsibility for the outcomes of their choices no matter how reluctantly or ambivalently they might have made them. If the special pleading which discriminates various choices as right or wrong (and on which the sceptic considers all certainties to be founded) is disrupted, allegedly objective preferences and proprieties are revealed to be dependent on persuasive combinations of circumstance and emotion and all possible moral positions or systems must be consciously *chosen* by the individual who favours them; as none will, or rationally can, *command* unequivocal obedience. Individuals can feel themselves obliged and even compelled to observe common moral standards, standards of social cohesion for instance, to which their own personal desires are subordinated, but these standards remain merely worldly or necessary, they do not warrant the absolute reverence or faith of the devoted individual. But for absolute idealists, who long to surrender self-interest and personal accountability in service to something greater, this exposure debases the act of moral commitment: one can still

make good and bad moral decisions, but there is no longer any prospect that they will align the individual with an abstract fund of irreproachable directives.

For goodness' sake, dear Wilhelm, I did not mean you when I complained that people who urge us to be resigned to inevitable fate are unbearable.... Basically you are right, of course. But, dear friend, with this one proviso: things in this world seldom come down to an either-or decision, and possible courses of action, and feelings, are as infinitely various as kinds of noses on the gamut from hooked to snub.

Forgive me, then, if I concede your entire argument and still try to find a loophole between the either and the or.⁷

Young Werther's observation that nothing is really either-or, though seemingly one of glib consent to the relativism of "this world", merely re-establishes his commitment to the privilege of holding aloof in expectation of a higher calling. The need for individual equivocation and choice from a collection of equally legitimate courses is a daunting sign of the dispersal of the aristocratic prestige of inspiration to which he feels entitled. Werther's loophole shirks this democratic indignity in the guise of an apology for his impracticality; he is, of course, ruthless in pursuing his desired image of himself as the recipient of inspiration, 'my duty is to wait', he seems to suggest with convenient humility. In its actual absence Werther defers to the *prospect* of an external resolution of the either-or cacophony, and takes solace in the pre-emptive nobility of holding aloof in the name of the imminent distinction of conviction. In Werther's attitude it is possible to see a pattern of absolutist resistance to a recognised relativism in the field of worldly action. From these infinitely various courses of action, though, there appears no prospect of acting out a role of lucid, and therefore commonly approved, absolute moral propriety. Absolutists *need* to believe absolutes exist in order to justify their participation in the world: without absolutes activity is merely pride and self-interest, with absolutes activity suggests duty and vocation. It is with a similar kind of *need* that Dostoevsky confronts the pervasive effects of the ambivalent moral relativism of the secular world. His characters share his need but, fastening on the mirages of secular absolutes, they commit themselves to the deification of their pride and self-interest in order to sustain the mirage of duty.

To sustain this deification (often of an arrested, solipsistically cloistered virtue), these characters are unwittingly required to spurn some facets of communal association.

Refusing the mutually assured, but undifferentiating, significance of conventional association, they need some form of emotional surrogacy. To compensate and support them in their resistance to what they perceive as the debased investiture of convention and conservatism with the residual authority of universal meaning and purpose, these individuals desire (avidly) assurances of the general and essential significance of their subjective intuitions of morality and truth.

The advance from the solipsistic romanticism of Goethe's Werther, for example, to Clough's inward looking and uncommitted heroes brings us to a field of introspection less distorted by the subject's self-infatuation or by any enthusiasm for the authenticity of an individuals' self-knowledge. While Werther seems trapped within his internal impressions of exterior reality, Clough's heroes have a sturdy disinclination to believe in the authenticity of their impulses. The individual who perceives the gamut of his or her inspirations amidst the circumstantial origins and strategies they emerge from is perched on the brink of clarity and proportion. Perched on this brink, Clough's heroes are nevertheless deprived of equanimity by an emotional affiliation to a grand narrative or external authority which demands their participation in a charade of conviction. The distorting influence of this demand accompanies the relentless undermining of any single truth, role or compulsion which Clough, without a hint of distemper or casuistry, undertakes.

Dipsychus and Claude are full of trepidation in relation to the future, to movement, and to change. Both are equally fond of and strongly attached to their present mode of living. In Claude's, "bid me not venture on aught that could alter or end what is present! ... drive me not out ... from my Eden", it is essentially all *artificial* prompting that he proposes resisting.⁸ Essentially, Claude proclaims that if he is to give up his idyll of innocent abstraction it will have to be for something pure and precious, a transcendent distillate and inspiration of love, for instance, not the artificial promptings of social expectation. Claude himself, though, is uncertain of his ability to distinguish the real from the artificial, "I have had pain, it is true; have wept; and so have the actors".⁹

⁷ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, transl. Michael Hulse (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1989), 58.

⁸ Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, *Clough - Selected Poems* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 75-154, II.xii.275-77.

⁹ Clough, *Amours*, V.viii.165.

The inability to attain constancy of purpose is a principal concern throughout Clough's poetry.¹⁰ The recurring formulation of the problem reflects a persisting dilemma that becomes an almost standardised challenge to activity and to the role of self-consciousness in times of uncertainty. In *The Bothie*, Phillip Hewson expresses this feeling of existing devoid of clearly sanctioned purpose or moral direction:

What are we to resist, and what are we to be friends with?
If there is battle, 'tis battle by night: I stand in the darkness,
Here in the melee of men, Ionian and Dorian on both sides,
Signal and password known; which is friend and which is foeman?¹¹

To the individual seeking to undertake decisive action there is "Only infinite jumble and mess and dislocation".¹² This same tableau registers the same confused deprivation in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (ca. 1851): "we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night".¹³ Regardless of the somewhat different conclusions drawn from this trope (pragmatic acceptance versus romanticised pessimism), both treatments register the challenge of an uncertain moral environment.

¹⁰ Stefanie Markovits' recent essay "Arthur Hugh Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, and the Victorian Crisis of Inaction" (*Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 53, 4 (2001), 445-78), contains a concise contextualisation of parallels that exist between Clough's biography and some of the dilemmas explored throughout his works, and also a brief survey of some trends and conventions in critical responses to Clough's literary career. Markovits explores the myth of Clough's unfulfilled promise (noting, for example, the strong influence this myth exerted over the "critical imagination" of many of his Victorian critics) in order to emphasise the relationship of this myth to an intellectual climate in which some critics had begun to exalt action and productive engagement in reaction against what Matthew Arnold called the dialogue of the mind with itself (a kind of overwrought and inert interiority). Markovits' purpose appears to be a juxtaposing of this myth, and the conventions that provoked it, with a reading of Clough's work that emphasises his engagement with the dilemmas entailed in what she calls "the crisis of inaction" (447). Markovits focuses on Clough's exploration of this crisis in *Amours de Voyage*, as played out in Claude's epistolary reflections (which are variously both deliberate and unwitting) of his inward life. Markovits touches on Clough's depictions of some of the effects on individuals of the disorientation of abstract frameworks of belief, propriety and morality from the order imposed by an absolute endpoint or guiding principle such as God's divine authority. She explores Claude's attempts to conceive of political and emotional "feelings" strong enough and justifiable enough to precipitate worthwhile and credible courses of action. In focusing on Claude's failures, though, Markovits appears to seriously neglect and devalue the significance of the medium in which Claude's half-performances take place: he writes letters to Eustace, and attempts to explain and make sense of his uncertainty. This is in itself action, and though he fails to hit upon any absolute solution, solace or explanation which can dispel his feelings of disinheritance or satiate his desire for certainty, this action is, nevertheless, productive. I shall explore this element of Clough's depictions of uncertainty and isolation from moral support in the sections concerned specifically with Clough.

¹¹ Clough, *The Bothie*, IX, 79-82.

¹² *The Bothie*, IX, 94.

¹³ Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach", ln.35-37. As observed by Mary Schneider in "Plutarch's Night Battle in Arnold, Clough and Tennyson" (*The Arnoldian*, 9, 2 (1982), 32-38), the battle by night - originally from Thucydides, but which is also depicted by Plutarch - serves Tennyson to similar ends in *The Passing of Arthur* (1869).

The characters of Hamlet and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus both reflect circumstances in which credible beliefs, and the moral orientation they support, are challenged by new perspectives. It is a challenge which is perpetuated and reinforced by the consequential increase in sceptical detachment from traditional models of moral accountability and order. Those schooled and steeped in religion's inter-relationship with abstract moral order were both disoriented and becalmed by the new knowledge (primarily based in science and New Criticism of the Bible) that gradually suffocated the vitality of their divinely assured ethics. After their initial veneration for the kind of moral structure justified by divine authority, their subsequent critical disassociation and feelings of disinheritance from a role they desire but cannot affirm, generate responses fraught with a problematic dissatisfaction with the 'truths' they register. To the confused and uncommitted nineteenth century intellectual, uncertain of their individual rights and their social obligations, the malcontent in Jacobean drama (particularly the disinherited and disillusioned Hamlet) suggests a sympathetic ancestor and a dignifying lineage. With their characteristic mixture of dignity, originality, charisma and profound (often aggressive) uncertainty, displayed by these characters, it is hardly surprising that, in a circumstance defined by its sceptical detachment from contemporary modes of conviction and estimable social roles, they might have appeared to offer desirable co-ordinates, or supported feelings of orientation, to an intellectual tradition defined by its open confrontation of uncertainty and the ambiguous virtues of convention. Such recognition holds the potential both for glorification and proportion: in identifying with Hamlet, for instance, both the straightforward joy of recognition and affinity, and the critical association of experiencing a similar symptom due to a similar circumstance are available. Faustuli and *gamletiki* are diminutive "types", the imitators *en masse* and corruptions of the archetype. And in these corruptions they reveal themselves.

*"Unpregnant of my cause"*¹⁴

If the precondition for action is certainty, Hamlet's suggestion that "conscience does make cowards of us all", would seem to hold true.¹⁵ Conscience, whether interpreted as

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, (1605 Quarto), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, 2.2.571.

¹⁵ *Hamlet*, 3.1.83. The precise meaning of "conscience" in this context is a source of much contention. I take conscience to mean more than solely moral conscience, and to include a capacity to intellectually entertain, in any one circumstance, the multiplicity of possible and credible actions, or perspectives, and similarly to weigh the respective costs of these possibilities prior to acting on them. It is a quality, as I will discuss later, which compels individuals to look at any situation from a multitude of vantages, as

a prescient reckoning of the various possible alternatives and consequences of action, as the awareness and anticipation of responsibility and guilt, or simply another word for thought, suggests a disruptive mediation between stimulation and action. Either through the habitual preliminary response of reflection, or through the subsequent discovery of grounds for any number of legitimate responses, the moment and the grounds for action both dissipate into myriad channels of possibility and consequence. In contrast, certainty and action will proceed from the absence or depletion of conscience's consuming devotion to thought. Alternatively, as in Faust's case, action will proceed in spite of underlying uncertainty through a necessary thoughtlessness and a diminished capacity to *care* for others.¹⁶ Conscientious objection to the compromise required by action, suggests a chosen moral independence from the *dilemma* of the unpregnant pause. It does not, however, alleviate the moral condition it reacts against. The conscientious objection is not made on behalf of a *specific* moral vantage, but rather, as in Clough's poems, against the conventions which presume the necessity of moral absolutes. It accepts the primacy of conscience and rejects the esteem for stable certainties which drives individuals to surrender their moral choices to an external ideological program. Whether in passive resistance, or direct action, this type of conscientious objection eschews the self-preservation of non-commitment in the absence of absolute certainty, and similarly avoids the faustian eradication of equivocation which facilitates the impression of their presence.

Preoccupation with the possibility of consolation suggests a response to the disappointment and deprivation engendered by a presumption of entitlement (*ie.* to transcendent authorities) alloyed with a feeling of loss. The great expectations nurtured by the higher line of Tractarian evangelism, or equally by the discovery of the buried self, devotion to the sublime, or strict observance of the greatest good for the greatest number, each project a direct causal relation between ideological commitment and feelings of selfless fulfillment. To those accustomed to observe virtues as the dispensations of transcendent authority, the disruption of this causal relationship suggests an unpalatable breach between virtue and absolute good. The dissolution of

opposed to the tunnel vision which is often so instrumental in attaining and maintaining *absolute* conviction or commitment. Hamlet's observation brings into focus a relationship to moral confusion which W.B. Yeats reiterates in "The Second Coming"; both essentially recognise or suggest, that, as a corollary of moral confusion, "the best lack all conviction". Apparent in Yeats' poem's designation of "the best", is the sceptical suspension of conviction, commitment or belief by those who are most scrupulously honest and true to the ambiguities with which secular reality presents them.

¹⁶ I shall discuss the significance of solipsistic idealists' capacity to care, both emotionally and practically, for others at greater length in the section "Care".

these positivistic expectations reduces individuals to their own capacity to discriminate among the nebulous gradations of moral choices; the “right” choice is no longer provided by their higher line.

The need for consolation then, or the assurance provided by transcendent certainties, is common to the idealising urges of both the little-Hamlets and the little-Fausts. These characters’ desire to affiliate themselves with authorities which allegedly draw their potency from something “higher” than circumstantial utility or contingency, leads them to respond in particular ways to the substantive uncertainty which confronts them. The two broad types of response I am suggesting, the faustian compromise and the unpregnant pause, are distinct reactions to this fundamental condition of disorientation. The unpregnant pause refers to the experience, through an openness and scrupulous fidelity to the simultaneously valid claims of contending inspirations, convictions, beliefs and ideas, of an incapacity to commit to a single path of satisfactory activity. It is what Hamlet notes as the apparent cowardice, or shrinking from action, engendered by conscience. Or alternatively the consequence, as Dipsychus observes, of a circumstance in which “we cannot act without assuming x / And at the same time y its contradictory”;¹⁷ acting out of absolute conviction, Dipsychus complains, has become an untenable anachronism. The faustian compromise, though, performs this necessary prelude to action by undermining the given background of uncertainty by selecting elements of reality as “truth” in order to formulate a semblance of conviction or absolute compulsion to act in the manner one is already inclined towards or desirous of at some level (as with Dipsychus, whose desire for certainty dominates his desire to remain true to his ideal and deems it untenable accordingly). Actions which would most likely have been performed regardless are justified as manifestations of principled behaviour, allowing the individual to guard their self-esteem from having to admit its inconsistency to itself or face any consequences as resulting from a purely personal decision. The blinkered commitment of the faustian is a reaction against uncertainty, but it refuses to acknowledge the elements of reality it has compromised in order to attain this semblance of certainty.

I have of late, but where-
fore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of
exercises: and indeed it goes so heavily with my dis-
position that this goodly frame the earth seems to me

¹⁷ Clough, *Dipsychus and The Spirit, Clough - Selected Poems* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 155-234, 2.5.161-62.

Hamlet's malaise offered an emblem of a breach from smooth custom and accepted convention, a disruption which both leads to and accompanies the awkward detachment from a harmonious relationship between custom and personal impulse. The inability to match the suitable response to the "cue for passion" generates Hamlet's sense that social order has been disrupted, and also the anxiety over whether he is fitted for the heroic role – "The time is out of joint, O curséd spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!"¹⁹ – which his personal circumstance appears to require of him. This intuition is practically galling, though not as a recognition specifically of weakness but rather of the plain fact of his inability to feel confident in a means of fulfilling his obligation. It is for this reason that Hamlet's unpregnant pause offers such a subtle and potentially fertile delineation of the individual's relationship with abstract ideals in conditions of uncertain moral verities, where no authoritative common means of coalescing internal moral perspectives with an external convention seem available.²⁰

"Are you honest?", becomes Hamlet's insistent subtext, while he remains unable to answer for himself. Is he worthy of his father's faith? Is Claudius a king by right or might? Is Laertes a good son or a fool too readily played upon? Hamlet becomes a rogue element, out of joint with the habitual explanations and relationships of the court. In his desire to penetrate beneath the dissembling which he suddenly detects all around him, he is denied the posture of questioning spirit by the apparent necessity of deliberate action; this obligation, though, sits as affectation on the unpregnant prince. In Clough's poem "The human spirits saw I on a day",²¹ the "sceptic melancholy" (ln.49) of the malcontent, free of troubling obligations to compel decisive action, is unleashed on contented ignorance:

Dost thou not know that these things only seem? –
I know not, let me dream my dream.
Are dust and ashes fit to make a treasure? –

¹⁸ *Hamlet*, 2.2.299-303.

¹⁹ *Hamlet*, 1.5.188-89.

²⁰ Hamlet, through feeling himself bound to a role which he seems to find himself unconvinced by, unconvincing in, or otherwise unsuited to, experiences a psychological discomfort which nurtures the implicit desire (which subtly alienates him from reality) that his personal inclinations and public, social or political responsibilities should exist in lucid harmony. A similar desire can be seen to motivate Faust's ideological disavowal of the legitimacy of any dissenting whispers that might otherwise trouble him also with the merely subjective authority of his mandates and convictions. When Faust is blinded by Care he is being reproached for the brutal censorship through which he has facilitated his own passionate conviction of the objective legitimacy of his absolute authority.

²¹ Clough, "The human spirits saw I on a day", *Clough Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995) 32-33.

I know not, let me take my pleasure.
(ln.12-15)

The personified “questioning spirit” (ln.38) in Clough’s poem affirms a background in which uncertainty and ignorance are virtues far more valuable than the semblance of certainty sustained through negligence. Against this background the semblance of certainty does not sanctify but rather jeopardises action. This will be discussed at greater length with regard to the faustian compromise and Clough’s longer poems, *Amours* and *Dipsychus*.

Clough’s “questioning spirit” concludes:

I also know not, and I need not know,
Only with questionings pass I to and fro,
Perplexing those that sleep, and in their folly
Inbreeding doubt and sceptic melancholy.
(ln.46-49)

The notable presence of men of thought, critics, authors and malcontents in literary depictions of abstract uncertainty, reflects their characteristic possession of a set of habits, concerns and attitudes which sustain a certain type of interrogation of conventional reality. Their involvement in this “interrogation” renders them fertile conduits for depictions of the ramifications of these uncertainties, both in their abstract engagement and in their relationships with reality which proceed in counterpoint to this engagement.

In Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1604), the disinterested voice of the Epilogue suggests that ignorance itself is no crime, “Troth, to err is fit”;²² however, the strategy of promoting one’s ignorant self under claims of expertise or certainty, *is*. The honesty that, in Elizabethan times, reflects a regard for a higher moral order and a rigorous rejection of false paths to worldly advancement exists for Clough’s malcontents as a merely cautionary insight into the limited scope of knowledge. For Clough’s questors there is no ideological revelation or transcendence to be attained through knowledge. However, in the relationship to traditional forms of certainty or conviction which this deprivation encourages, the “sceptic melancholy”, recognising the legitimate obsolescence of absolutist idealism, potentially discovers a truly fertile penetration into the function of idealism. It offers, therein, the substantial wisdom, lauded beyond all

²² John Marston, *The Malcontent, The Malcontent and Other Plays* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 117-76, Epilogue, ln.11.

else (when all alternatives have been discredited), of knowing one is dreaming (ideals, semblances etc.) and consenting to carry on.²³

Hamlet's suspicion of the prompts of "heaven and hell", suggests a challenge to the unity or jurisdiction of conventionally accepted moral directives. Goethe's Faust goes much further: "No scruples to plague me, no irksome doubt, / No hell-fire or devil to worry about".²⁴ This posture is one of Goethe's first tools in characterising Faust's disaffection. The credibility of moral guidelines based on eternal judgement is one of the problems which God's 'death' in the nineteenth century forces to the fore of all attempts to establish new certainties around which the dimensions of a good, noble and dignified life could be resolved. It does remain, though, a contention, rather than forming the substance of a conviction such as Faust confesses to ("no irksome doubt"). Faust's conviction is of dubious value in the context of Goethe's work, given that the crowning glory of his totalitarian trappings on reality is divine absolution and a trip to heaven.²⁵ Dmitry Karamazov's notion that without God "all is permitted" is one

²³ This resembles Nietzsche's recommendation for a wise freedom from the mendaciousness of ideology:

I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish ... among all these dreamers, I, too, who "know," am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and the sublime consistency and inter-relatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also the continuation of the dream.

The Gay Science, aph. 54, 116.

²⁴ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust - Part One*, trans. David Luke; 1987 (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998 (1987)), ln.368-69.

²⁵ In *Myths of Modern Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ian Watt compares the anti-individualist implications of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, in particular Faustus' ultimate damnation, with Goethe's last-minute abrogation of Faust's debt to the devil (not to mention Faust's culpability for making this deal to begin with). The ambition of Goethe's Faust is sanctified as a noble impulse of human advancement and his follies excused as natural human flaw. In spite of his contract with Mephistopheles, at the last minute angels intercede and Faust, regardless of his sins, failings and complicity in the Devil's chores, is favoured with grace and borne away from hell so that he might strive his way to heaven. In Goethe's romantic incarnation, one might concede that Faust's escape from the condemnation suffered by his precursors is perhaps justified by the simple fact that his striving reflects an attempt to make the secular and morally disparate world cohere to a binding principle. Faust's crimes, that is, are individualist but also in the spirit of the age.

"He who strives on and lives to strive / Can earn redemption still" (ln.11936-37). Faust's constant striving seems to be offered as a tendency which somehow mitigates the extent of his personal culpability for the trail of destruction that builds up in his wake. This exoneration, though, seems fatuous in the context of Mephistopheles' asides, in which Faust's goals, no matter how altruistic, are routinely mocked and dismissed as petty fancies. While Faust is at pains to stress the commitment to philanthropic reform that lies at the heart of the schemes he strives to realise, the damage he does is no less real; while his schemes bear the mark of transient despotism, the follies and cruelties they oversee do not fade. To forgive him for wreaking such havoc on the strength of convictions which the play tells us are empty, seems to side entirely with Faust's deluded perspective of himself. Faust's absolution then stands as a wilful anomaly in a divine trumping of the devil; it is to the credit of God's infinite power and compassion and to the angels who beat back devils to win Faust's soul as a prize, rather than suggesting

response to this loss of a moral horizon. Dmitry's proposition is essentially a question, or challenge: if God was the reason for the delineation of good and evil before, what is it that will convince or demonstrate to people that all is *not* permitted in God's absence?

The malcontent's sceptical (and distempered) palate registers the discrepancy between public conventions of honourable action and the dubious moral essence that underlies them. Due to the need to approve a clear moral mandate in order to act with the sanction of conviction, malcontents often feel themselves restricted to a choice between hypocritical participation or uncommitted scepticism. In each case they are vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy relating to notions of conventional duty and to critical rigour, and each challenge is felt sincerely.

Between the figure of Hamlet in Shakespeare's play and the emblematic uses to which the character is put, there are of course considerable and revealing discrepancies. While feeling that Hamlet's circumstances offer an analogy for their feelings of disenchantment and uncertain commitment, these characters are not struggling with the real problems posed by the suspicion that one's father, a head of state, has been assassinated by the man newly married to one's mother, and with the plethora of checks and balances that must be aligned to reconcile a proposed act of both personal vengeance and social policing. The persistence of this identification in spite of such differences, goes to reiterate some of the indulgences it provides. It allows, for example, the self-aggrandising identification with a genuinely epic fate (a habit at once elitist (*grandeur is good*) and democratic (implying everyone can be grand of soul) in its allegiances), while also providing particular symbols and dilemmas which offer immediate form and a tradition to an essentially nebulous angst of metaphysical disinheritance and disorientation, and of the uncertainty of moral responsibilities this generates. The type of liberties taken in the course of such indulgent, and often self-solacing, or in some way mitigatory, identifications are paralleled in the appropriation of other figures, such as Don Quixote and Faust, by individuals, and groups, selectively seeking out characteristics which seem to aggrandise or iconicise traits they already

any kind of moral exoneration of Faust. The angels concede that Faust is "An earthbound, immature / And fragmentary, / Fireproof yet still impure / Burden" (11954-57), his rescue from Mephistopheles' demons is in anticipation of the exoneration he will undergo in the presence of God's love, rather than a recognition that his sins were justified or had been in some way already absolved. His striving does not absolve him, it blinds him and destroys others.

One of the only justifications I can think of for "saving" Faust from the Hell he sold himself to, is the notion that his final approval of the world, which is implicit in his desire that the moment should linger, sets him free from the pride of individualism and reflects a moral graduation to selfless cooperation with reality. This explanation, though, is unsatisfying (as are others like it) given that Faust's consent to linger, his contentment with his lot, is based on his belief that the reality he will be lingering in is that which he has just wrought for himself through a defiant travesty of the natural world.

esteem and with which they already identify themselves, but which have an otherwise dubious or simply vague standing (both in reality and often within the works from which these emblematic characters are lifted). These figures offer compelling icons which allow those who resort to them to deem their particular habits estimable.

In the image of Hamlet's unpregnant detachment, the fathers and children of the nineteenth century recognised their own resented obligations and struggle to avoid or dignify (as conviction, compulsion or entitlement, for instance, rather than choice) the *necessary* disavowals required by worldly participation.²⁶ The scenario manifests in attitudes and ideals, among other things, as a contesting of the grounds of communication and the qualities on which each generation seeks to found the desired order of their world.

The failure to accept or adopt any first principle or cause on which to act, coupled with a persisting conviction that such absolute validations do exist, consign Raskolnikov, Faust, and Hamlet, in varying ways, to flurries of violence in reaction against the-world-as-it-is. Though Raskolnikov, in particular, *seems* to act decisively and from conviction, it becomes apparent, as I shall show later, that his ideological crime is compelled by a desire to precipitate certainty from confusion by acting *as if* with conviction. Rather than decisive, though, this type of precipitated activity typically seems despairing, abandoned and instinctive; a flight from equivocated moral judgements. This kind of *denouement* expresses both the abnormality of spontaneous gratification and its unsustainability within the field of everyday moral interaction. Raskolnikov's act of murder, which he later pronounces a self-destruction, is motivated by a similar sense of being bound by an indecipherable equation. Fancies in which wish fulfilments are realised suggest imagination's passive cure for the prodigious desires it nurtures, the Underground Man, for example, sits in his chair enjoying the possibility and fancied reality of his election as Pope. These fancies construct frames of apparently credible activity and fulfilment. But such frames, like the external accord desired by the monologic individual, when acted out provoke scenarios in which the impropriety of such solipsistic projections becomes plain. As a literary trope, the fulfilment of a character's ideal can, and often does, serve as a trope in which individuals' desires to

²⁶ The calls to action that begin to hatch, partly out of frustrated indignity, from the little-Hamlets' brooding abstraction of doubt are often initially offered and affirmed as a necessary progression from intellectual conviction. In Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, Bazarov's commitment is fierce in its own disgruntled unpregnantness with the servitude to a population he has only philosophical regard for; it is merely the circumstantial focus of what he feels to be his duty to purvey scientific reforms.

see their subjectively idealised worldviews reified appears as a kind of inherently corrupting enchantment.²⁷

The Tyrants' Way

When Faust learns, from a distance, that Gretchen has been jailed for her association with him, he blames Mephistopheles both for keeping it from him (Faust's negligence) and for letting it happen (Faust's guilt). Mephistopheles responds: "Are you snatching for the thunder? A good thing it was not given to you wretched mortals, to blast your adversary when he makes an innocent reply! That's the way of tyrants, venting their spleen when they're in an embarrassing pass".²⁸ The detachment from intimate moral engagement facilitated by Mephistopheles' supernatural services indulges and reinforces Faust's overwhelming self-love. The episode involving Philemon and Baucis, in *Faust II*, depicts a similarly blind and culpably callous egocentrism. Faust's predatory seduction of Margareta (Gretchen) and his subsequent inability to attend to her with anything but hollow lip-service to his idea of love, or feel in her fate more than a personal affront to his management of the affair,²⁹ reveals an incapacity to register (or an aversion to) the mutual responsibilities of intimacy.³⁰ In the second part of *Faust* this inability has graduated to a grander scale in Faust's latent, but potent, campaign to eradicate any lifestyle or tradition which, nurturing values alternative to his own, contests the validity of his authoritative ideal vision. In this colossal context it becomes more apparent that Faust's inhumanity reflects an internal compromise (a necessarily selective approach to truth) which is fundamental to his feeling that he is entitled to

²⁷ The fate of the false authorities which individuals often conjure to expedite their faustian compromises, provides a platform for moral fables portraying the corrosive unreality of wish fulfilments that offer ideologically justified and essentially innocent alterations of what an individuals considers a hitherto unsatisfactory reality.

²⁸ Goethe, *Faust – Part One*, "A Gloomy Day. Open Country", <48-52>. (These reset line numbers designate a scene inserted between ln. 4398 and ln.4399).

²⁹ Faust considers this affront will be allayed by the alleviation of merely its punitive consequence: to free Gretchen is, for Faust, a means of dismissing the charges against him which are implicit in Gretchen's social ruin.

³⁰ Faust's attraction to Margareta seems intensified by her personal virtuousness and her devout faith. Faust does not consciously set out to indulge in the perverse or cynical pleasure of defiling something pure, but rather seems obliviously caught between this negating desire and an intuitive attempt to prove to himself his capacity for goodness by showing himself a suitable match for Margareta. In his enthusiasm for his lady, from distance, and in his limp outrage with Mephistopheles after learning of Gretchen's unhappy situation, Faust can be seen carrying off the role of a passionate lover with unwitting affectation.

order the universe around him, and to his “deduction” that he is entirely *justified* in acting on this feeling.³¹

In the faustian compromise, the “compromise” is not simply another name for the traditional idea of a Faustian bargain or compact; rather, “compromise” is intended to accentuate the full range of reality which is strategically *compromised* by the selective approvals of “objective truth” which authorise an individualist’s absolute commitment to his or her ideal. This act of compromise, is implicit also in the faustian activist’s willingness to overlook or simplify the multiplicity by which, for example, Hamlet’s coward-making conscience seems paralysed.³²

Faust has been driven into a cynical state of destructive abandon by his dawning conviction that what had been his guiding idea, a positivistic devotion to the unravelling powers of knowledge, was a delusion. His initial ‘idealistic’ dissent is born, then, out of egotistical frustration and disgust with a world that suddenly seemed to mock him with its emptiness and ambivalence to his previous devotions. Having cursed his prior affinity, along with the desires, values and goals with which it had been intertwined,³³ a chorus of spirits inform Faust that his curse has “destroyed / the beautiful world” (ln.1609-10). The spirits then call upon Faust (a world-wrecking “demigod”), to build anew and with a clear mind a replacement for what he has cleared away. The spirits’ encouragement (or subtle entrapment) wins Faust; his demands from Mephistopheles quickly show the influence of their insinuated counsel, “Smash this [world] first, then let the next be born!”³⁴ And Faust is furnished forthwith with a maxim that equates anarchic liberty, and the dismissal of inhibitive traditions, with benevolent revolution.³⁵ Faust later proves himself a willing recipient of the mantle of world builder which, rather than representing a secondary obligation of the world *wrecker*, reflects a vocation

³¹ With regard to the serial nature of Faust’s sins and the extreme damage wrought by them, it seems strange that Goethe should rescue his Faust from the hell which traditionally had been his ultimate fate. Though Goethe’s Faust does in the end learn that he had lived a blind and barren life, Goethe’s approval of Faust’s reprieve seems somewhat cursory.

³² In relation to the ideological non-commitment of Axel Heyst, the narrator of Conrad’s *Victory* (1915) observes a similar correlation between action and incomplete vision: “It is not the clear-sighted who lead the world. Great achievements are accomplished in a blessed, warm mental fog, which the pitiless cold blasts of the father’s analysis had blown away from the son” (*Victory* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), 87). The warm fog of conviction anaesthetises, the passage suggests, the compulsion or ability to reflect (“a destructive process”) and to reckon the costs of worldly activity. Alternatively, as W.B. Yeats famously put it in “The Second Coming”, when the centre will not hold, “The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity”.

³³ Goethe, *Faust – Part One*, ln.1587-1606.

³⁴ *Faust – Part One*, ln.1662.

³⁵ In *Faust – Part Two*, as Faust ponders Mephistopheles calls Faust a colonial power

that is inseparable, perhaps, from the wrecker's critical endeavour. Those who pull down 'old' forms usually strive to replace what their perceptions have discredited, but would they have acted in the first place without this sense of an alternative? The intellectual atmosphere bequeathed to the nineteenth century 'little-fausts' is such that, on an individual scale, they stand at this point necessarily to begin with and must each undertake this process in kind, attempting with a clear mind (not necessarily a *tabula rasa* but, rather, without illusions) to establish worthy foundations. Their critical activity is undertaken as the ground-laying of a new truth, and is tainted therefore with a predisposition to discern order. What becomes apparent in the unpregnant pause, as it appears in Clough's work, is that this *predisposition* is itself a prejudice, and perhaps an anachronism.

Faust's creed of action aims at individual refinement or illumination through loss, gain, woe and pain; he wants, in short, to experience everything, and without preliminary moral criteria imposing guidelines as to what these experiences *ought* to provoke as normative moral responses. What differentiates this from an essentially anarchic posture is Faust's alleged willingness to accept a "moral" form as it gradually suggests itself (a situation which requires a necessary indulgence of individuals' nascent responsibility, similar to that which is implicit in legal flexibility as to the responsibility of minors). But what would really emerge from this free-style experience? It requires perhaps a certain type of discrimination to begin with (the individual must bring a faculty of judgement, their reactions must be justified, or qualified, if they are to be of other than a purely subjective significance) or the abandonment of individual desires and prejudices.³⁶ But Faust's liberation is not like this, he rebels from a point of disaffection, and identifies as much with the dismissal of convention as with laying himself indiscriminately open to all ranges of experience which this facilitates.

Similarly, Faust's reluctance to emulate his father, whose medical equipment strikes him as a mocking and accusing inheritance,³⁷ also allows him a pretence of expiating the guilt bequeathed to him through the dubious ministrations and motives of his father. Through this posture, ostensibly adopted on behalf of the peasants his father callously patronised and exploited, he conscientiously objects to and discredits the precedent of benevolent public service which Wagner, for example, saw in him. Here

³⁶ Such abandonment, a necessity of moving beyond the influence of obsolete beliefs and practices, is approvingly described by Nietzsche as one of the essential qualities of his men of tomorrow, the critical and disinterested "scholars", in *Beyond Good and Evil*.

³⁷ See *Faust – Part One*, ln. 668-69.

the folk are a mere convenience for Faust's desire to liberate himself from a particular obligation; he is as little concerned with their exploitation as his father. The perfect modern world Faust ultimately plans is free from superstitious ignorance and free also from the inhibitive guilt of privilege, because the folk, in dealings with whom Faust has been forced to confront such complications, have been excluded. It is a utopia of complete accord between aspiration and reality guaranteed by the systematic eradication or silencing of circumstance's challenges and obligations. Faust's aspirations, though, are formed merely in the image of the particular provocation and dissatisfactions he has experienced.

In Faust's eventual 'triumph' over nature, Berman suggests "he has finally achieved a synthesis of thought and action, he had used his mind to transform the world. He has helped mankind assert its rights over the anarchic elements".³⁸ But mankind has no such rights: Faust's triumph results from his wilful opposition to natural forces. It is a triumph dependent on a problematic relationship, the stasis of the unpregnant pause, being polarised into conflict.

The romantic quest for self-development, which has carried Faust so far, is working itself out through a new form of romance, through the titanic work of economic development. Faust is transforming himself into a new kind of man, to suit himself to a new occupation. In his new work, he will work out some of the most creative and some of the most destructive potentialities of modern life; he will be the consummate wrecker and creator, the dark and deeply ambiguous figure that our age has come to call "the developer."³⁹

This figure, though, is still driven by the need to acquire a secure future, in which stability and rest are possible. In this suggested combination of the acting and contemplating person, Berman optimistically offers a solution for the troublesome dichotomy of men of action and men of reflection.⁴⁰ However, while Faust's plan is a facet of thought, his execution of it rather involves an internal compromise in which the legitimate obstacles are discredited and silenced. Faust's capacity to act is achieved through the repression of certain dimensions of thought as a means of allowing his plan to attain the semblance of authority.⁴¹

³⁸ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 65.

³⁹ *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, 62-63.

⁴⁰ This distinction serves the men of reflection (as opposed to the men of action, predominantly though not exclusively), from Dostoevsky's *Underground Man* to Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*, as a means both of chastising and lauding their greater affiliation with abstractions than with reality.

⁴¹ As well as neglecting the aesthetic and subjective, or humanistic, aspects of the sensibilities of the individuals who would form Russia's radical intelligentsia of the 1860s, the scientific and technological focus of their education emphasised an obligation, born out of the privilege of expertise, to apply their

Hamlet's suggestion that prescient reckoning and decisive action might be incompatible is frequently echoed in many parallel attempts to explain or denounce the unfruitful burden of thought, but such insights frequently serve also as prods to provoke conscientiously uncommitted individuals into action.⁴² Berman sees Faust's developments as an example of this synthesis of thought and action. But while it might be argued that Faust does reify what appear to be rational, purely intellectual reforms into direct action, this is a crystallisation in which the limited capacities of deliberate thought, and the influence of a limited self-knowledge, are made manifest. In the presence of echoes from the past, conjured by Philemon's and Baucis' church-bell, Faust is still prone to the "sharpest torment" the "rich man" can feel, the taunting remoteness of what "he has not got" (peace of mind, for instance, as well as the old couple's linden grove).⁴³ The deliberate reification of his desired ideal is not inherently satisfying because though he can efface all traces of the heritage he has betrayed he has not actually made peace with it, he has achieved no inner change.

The faustian compromise generates a fanaticism which is inevitably isolating. Fanaticism is intrinsically censorious and survives on the denial of opposing information. In the fanaticism of the faustian compromise, through which individuals attempt to actively align reality with their idealism, denial and assertion go hand in hand to mould an individual psychology displaced from communal modes of discourse and agreement. Outside the confines of their fanaticism, the faustians become incapable of verifying their desired self-image and idealised orientation to reality.

knowledge to developing practical reforms and advances that would strengthen the state. However: "Encouraged by their training as well as by the state to employ their expertise to solve society's problems, members of these elites used their knowledge of Western European institutions, conditions, and ideas to decry both the injustices, oppressiveness and backwardness of Russian society" (Katz & Wagner 1989, 3). The type of conviction generated by the nature of this generations' particular expertise and mindset, such as their faith in the apparently authoritative objectivity and utilitarian transparency of their rational methods, provided the 1860's radicals with the kinds of pseudo-logical "justifications" for decisive activity and activism which their predecessors had lacked. This generation exhibited a greater confidence (or through their sophistry and ideological assertions and omissions they stifle their anxiety) in their right to act on the ubiquitous obligation felt by such minorities to form their world anew in the image of their enlightened and progressive certainty. This confidence, though, and the actions it facilitates is attained through the kind of disregard for alternatives, which they refuse to or are unable to recognise as credible arguments for tempering their own convictions. This is the kind of confidence sought in and granted by the faustian compromise, it reflects the simple and permissive feeling of righteousness attained in the belief that one is acting on behalf of an unequivocal authority. It is against this alloy of ideological duty and rational utilitarian mandate to act that Dostoevsky reacts. The anti-positivistic recoil against such principles in his novels condemns their fundamental misappropriation of a limited ideology and the limited vision with which they justify a kind of self-serving annihilation of contentions under the proviso that they are sick or retrograde.

⁴² I have quoted Hamlet's "suggestion", previously; in his own words, it is that "conscience does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83).

Faust's reaction against the world of tradition and conformity forms the background to his initial bargain. When he agrees to plunge "into the rush of things / Of time and all its happenings"⁴⁴ he surrenders himself to circumstantial, contingent and unreflective action as a replacement for his scholarly devotion to learning and the "thread of thought"⁴⁵ which had preciously sustained him. Faust's recent and bitter disillusion contextualises his first rebellion, and the newly formed ambitions it produces, as the fruit of disappointment, it is a reactionary and spiteful betrayal of an ethic deemed inadequate to the expectations it had encouraged.

Faust's project to remake the world in keeping with his desires bears an analogy to the affronted aspirations of both Dostoevsky's Golyadkin and Gogol's madman Poprishchin, who each redefine their conception of the world to allow their desired self-image its rightful place in what they designate as reality. Werther and Wilhelm Meister, two more middle-class aspirants, also react similarly to the recalcitrance of reality. In the supernatural services provided by Mephistopheles, though, this solipsistic habit of individualism is given a means to make wishful ideals a reality. Submitting to this seduction, Faust invites the full impact of the unexpected isolation which so often accompanies the granting of wishful ideals. That the actual world is Faust's proper home is felt initially by him only as something to be repudiated or denied. In *Amours*, Claude makes a similar grudging concession to the necessity that he eat at the World's table, but remains openly contemptuous of its petty particular nature. Claude considers himself the victim of impersonal appetites, which are not born of personal desire but run contrary to it, and which grate against his natural inclination to abstract realms.⁴⁶

⁴³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust – Part Two*, trans. David Luke; 1994 (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), ln.11251-52.

⁴⁴ *Faust – Part One*, ln. 1754-55.

⁴⁵ *Faust – Part One*, ln. 1748-49.

⁴⁶ I shall discuss this tendency to perceive reality as the travesty of an ideal at greater length in my discussion of *Dipsychus and The Spirit* (and again in relation to Dostoevsky's portrayals of human or secular idealism). For now, though, here is an example of Claude's disdainful acceptance of worldly activity:

Yet we must eat and drink, as you say. And as limited
beings
Scarcely can hope to attain upon earth to an Actual
Abstract,
Leaving to God contemplation, to His hands knowledge
confiding,
Sure that in us if it perish, in Him it abideth and dies not,
Let us in His sight accomplish our petty particular
doings, -
Yes, and contented sit down to the victual that He has
provided.

Amours, III.vi.131-36

With the supernatural backing of Mephistopheles, Faust is able, in Goethe's *Faust - Part Two*, to indulge the impulses of his self-esteem and idealism in a manner that more overtly demonstrates the deluded rationale of his modernist compromise. "A great thought has inspired me: guess / It if you can".⁴⁷ Mephistopheles guesses first that Faust has decided to take "some mighty city" for his "Capital", with "wide avenues and squares" and the sprawl of "long suburbs", "traffic, loud and fast", with a "scuttling slither" of a populace of "swarming ants", a horde of reverential subordinates.⁴⁸ In Mephistopheles' celebration of the "fun" of this generic capital, he emphasises (true to his personal taste for disorder perhaps) the "nookshotten", the "poky" and the "fly-infested", and the chaotic busyness and stinking ferment nurtured within the unregulated expanse of a modern city. Mephistopheles' city is a distasteful and shambolic chaos, it almost seems calculated to repel, and provoke, Faust's aesthetic desire for order. Faust's laconic response: "All that, I fear, would fail to cheer me", is linked to a fear of civil strife and disobedience.⁴⁹ Prudently planning his role as the ruler of his ideal world, Faust is suspicious of the latent energies and discontents of a populace gathering in cities shaped by circumstantial necessity and prosperity rather than by the dictates of rational prescience: "they're all rebels in the making".⁵⁰

In noting that his "great thought" involves neither pleasure-palace nor city, Faust's aversions suggest the fundamentals of his idyll: it will neither be dangerously engaged with, nor segregated from, reality. In his positive expression of these imperatives Faust envisages the best of both worlds, he plans to remodel external reality to provide the implicit gratification of uninterrupted solipsistic indulgence: "I want to rule and to possess".⁵¹

Faust's "great thought" involves reclaiming land from the sea, he seeks to oppose nature's tides and the emblematic expanse of ambiguous land which the ocean cyclically claims and surrenders through the "useless elemental energy" of tides and breakers. Faust is tormented by the kind of symbolic fluidity which Claude comes to accept as the natural element of human endeavour towards truth and meaning. Whereas

Claude at least does not consider his appetites sinful, they are simply humiliating manifestations of human creatureliness which will not be stifled. In this short passage, Claude actually seems quite content with the nature of this compromise, but it follows on from his explanation of the sanctuary he has made out of the idea of his unperturbed interior self; in which he has already discredited, to his satisfaction, the necessity of abiding by worldly circumstance. We might notice also that it is particularly with God in mind, not the virtuals themselves, that Claude can allow himself this expression of commitment.

⁴⁷ Goethe, *Faust - Part Two*, ln. 10134-35.

⁴⁸ *Faust - Part Two*, ln. 10135-54.

⁴⁹ *Faust - Part Two*, ln. 10155.

⁵⁰ *Faust - Part Two*, ln. 10159.

⁵¹ *Faust - Part Two*, ln. 10187.

Claude envisages the changed circumstances of secular isolation from the solid ground of faith as a cormorant existence bobbing over crest and trough, Faust seeks to conquer the fluid element by reclaiming the contested ground which it renders uninhabitable. Claude's vision accepts uncertainty while Faust seeks to forcibly approve those elements which appear to him to offer stability. Later he is again tormented by the unsolid swampland; he sets about draining it to provide the foundations for his new city.

Faust is compelled by his phobia of ambiguity to work against nature; he must forcibly correct the prodigality of nature's ambivalence. He relies on exploitative methods which mingle despotism with the occult, as Baucis reflects:

Slaves toiled vainly: blow by blow,
Pick and shovel made no way.
Then we saw the night flames glow –
And a dam stood there next day.
They used human sacrifice:
Fire ran down, like rivers burning.
All night long we heard the cries –
A canal was built by morning.⁵²

Philemon's and Baucis' assessment of Faust's progressive scheme, reclaiming land from the sea, goes no further than to note the dubiousness of its unnatural foundations. It is a speculation built on a contentious first principle, which holds no attraction for the couple who, now as always, feel themselves safely and soundly rooted in the old ways. In the couple's contentment, however, Faust experiences an implied dissent against his totalitarian program.

Damned bell! A treacherous wound that flies
As from a sniper's shot behind me!
Out there my endless kingdom lies,
But this vexation at my back,
These teasing envious sounds remind me
My great estate's not pure! That line
Of linden-trees, that little shack,
That crumbling chapel, are not mine.
On that green place I may not tread
Another's shadow falls like dread;
It irks my feet, my eyes, my ear –
How can I get away from here!⁵³

⁵² *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11123-30.

The oppression Faust experiences in the shade of past beliefs and traditional lifestyles, manifests in his vision of liberty.

Yes! to this vision I am wedded still,
And this as wisdom's final word I teach:
Only that man earns freedom, merits life,
Who must reconquer both in constant daily strife.
In such a place, by danger still surrounded,
Youth, manhood, age, their brave new world have
founded.
I long to see that multitude and stand
With a free people on free land!⁵⁴

Faust once more envisages his project as philanthropic; his vision, though, is entirely egocentric, and his blinkered commitment to its realisation is simple tyranny. "Until the edifice of this achievement stands, / One mind shall move a thousand hands";⁵⁵ one mind with no acknowledgment of unsympathetic others: "the creeping power of Care be great, / This power I will never recognize!"⁵⁶

Faust aims to create a habitat for a new breed of person: modern individuals like himself who feel suffocated and disenfranchised by traditional conventions. Drawn to his new world by their shared need to be *tatig frei* (free to act, not bound by tradition), a modern population does begin to emerge in the wake of his reforms. It becomes apparent, though, that the sanctity of this habitat can only be assured through the displacement of those who are not actively aligned with his ideals. These incompatible individuals constitute a population whose marginalised voices are still potent sources of dissent, and capable of insinuating the obtuseness of Faust's ideologically based reform.

As potent emblems of a conventional notion of "home", the traditional comforts of Philemon and Baucis ("sweet folk") challenge Faust's commitment to modernisation. "My will, my sovereign command / Is broken on that pile of sand!";⁵⁷ the lamentations and declamatory agony that surround Faust's declaration, "The old couple must give way!",⁵⁸ suggest dramatic formalities of self-justification as he shows himself he "must / Grow weary now of being just".⁵⁹ The edenic garden, old fashioned church, and Linden trees which recall his childhood, conjure emotional bonds which he *must*

⁵³ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11151-62.

⁵⁴ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11573-80.

⁵⁵ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11509-10.

⁵⁶ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11493-94.

⁵⁷ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11255-56.

⁵⁸ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11239.

⁵⁹ *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11271-72.

desecrate to affirm the unimpeachable authority of his new vision. Mephistopheles' subtle incitement of Faust's aggressive dismissal of such emblems suggests a precursor to Raskolnikov's policy of stepping over and also Nietzsche's assertions that genius does not, and should not be required to, recognise ordinary limitations. This resemblance and its position in the Faustian compromise suggests interesting ramifications for Nietzsche's modern nobility: in Nietzsche's own reflections on the fate of such figures, the probability of paranoia and distortion is plain within their celebration of their ascendancy over convention. The snarling superiority Nietzsche attributes to the *übermenschen* - who, if they are not in a position to lead, go it alone and snarl at the common reality that ignores or rejects their inspired edicts - is as compromised in its posture and expressions as Raskolnikov's sense of his own greater worth. This sense is most active in Raskolnikov's determination not to concede his feeling of utter diminution in relation to those who embody the laws and obligations he sought to escape.

The old couple are relics from classical literature; they seem to serve as symbolic idealisations of perennial parental nurture and uncomplaining selflessness. They are caring and good, but their satisfaction seems intrinsically conservative: they have every reason to question change and no reason to desire it, and hence resist the idea of palingenesis, so often proffered as the initial act of liberated modernization.⁶⁰ The old couple, therefore, are deemed (mistakenly as it turns out) to be a further element of tradition and emotional heritage which is superfluous to the developing age or consciousness. That this couple are not superfluous is made plain through the recollections of their visitor. They are rescuers, offering shelter and a mooring point in

⁶⁰ Marshall Berman suggests, in *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, that Faust's world-shaping modernism can only proceed after he has cathartically cast-off psychological dampeners which maintain an emotional bond to a childhood idyll of innocence and irrational enchantment, and which keep him from synchronising thought and action. In the Nineteenth-century Thomas Carlyle was a strong advocate of palingenesis as the one thing necessary to successfully reinvigorate the Christian spiritual tradition under threat of falling into complete discredit due to the erosion of the credibility of external authority. The idea of cultural death leading to rebirth was borrowed in part from the German romantics and in part by eastern mythology and religion, particularly by an Indian god who destroys the world with one hand while simultaneously recreating it with another. The decline of traditional religious faith in the West, throughout the nineteenth century and to the present, has often prompted individuals to seek and to borrow spiritual emblems and postures from the rest of the world, and from history (Buddhism, Confucianism, Hellenism, for example, even the trend towards Catholicism was based in what for many English ecclesiastics amounted to a relieving flight into mystical exoticism). These appropriated forms often seemed, in their exoticism (at once apparently simple or naïve and ornately authentic), to retain a facet of the mystical spiritual potency lost to the more thoroughly (and critically) understood and familiar ready-made traditions which had begun to solidify into quotidian history. In addition, social movements like socialism and Marxism, offered similar systematic bodies of law and conduct, new moral codes, while at the same time eschewing the contentious desire to maintain the role of external spiritual authority, and emphasising instead the humanistic potential for benevolent secular, rational and intellectual approval of just means of social organization and how to crystallise them.

a storm; in their ministrations to the shipwrecked traveller they provide a succour in distinct contrast to the kind Faust has resorted to in order to allay his own experience of intellectual strife and confusion. It is interesting to note, though, that the traveller, who returns and re-establishes an esteem for the traditional qualities Philemon and Baucis represent, is slaughtered along with the old couple by Faust's over-zealous allies. Mephistopheles recognises this expedient as an unspoken requirement in Faust's need to impose his vision with the semblance of a free hand; the need underlies Faust's order for the displacement of the old couple, but he balks at admitting the lengths that answering this need might require. Mephistopheles perhaps recognises the power of tradition and contentment which the old couple embody. With such moorings dismissed from the world, Faust is doomed to rootless isolation and the insatiable need for change which keeps him in Mephisto's thrall. When Faust no longer seeks to impose or experience change, and consents to linger, he surrenders life and soul, but also brings to an end the devil's work he has unwittingly been perpetrating in the neurotic momentum of his compulsive attempts to fit the world to his desires. Philemon and Baucis have the legitimate ability to baulk progress, their contentment strikes Faust as a mocking whisper. Faust can conquer the sea but not the old couple; he has no hold over them, their inertia defies the absolute authority of his values. For Faust, their presence maintains a proven alternative capable of disrupting the utter contentment his new world proposes.

At issue here is not the relative validity of modernisation or tradition but rather the necessary delusions generated by ideological reformers whose reverence for, and reliance on, the clear conscience of acting in subservient allegiance to ostensibly transcendent ideals (as opposed, for example, to accepting a responsibility to implement, and remain accountable for, pragmatic and partial checks on uncertainty) requires that they perceive a clear moral mandate for their cause. What Faust overlooks in willing the destruction of Philemon and Baucis, the narrator of Dostoevsky's "The Meek Girl"⁶¹ overlooks also under compulsion to manipulate his captive wife's perspective of him (I shall return to this later). When Faust has been blinded by Care, "the clash of spades" delights him, but what he supposes to be the sound of work to reify his vision is a group of Mephistopheles' goblins digging him a grave.⁶² He has been blind throughout to the ramifications of his vision on others and now he is blind to

⁶¹ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl" (1876), *Uncles Dream and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1989), 253-95. "The Meek Girl" has also been translated under the titles "A Gentle Creature" and "The Meek One: A Fantastic Story"; it was first published in 1876 as the November edition of Dostoevsky's *A Writer's Diary*.

the intrinsic rottenness of his unnatural insistence that the natural world should requite his personal desire for stable certainty.

The stifling awareness of justified alternatives both of action and inaction, like Hamlet's coward-making conscience, necessitates a compromise whereby subtleties of vision, and often sympathy for others are repressed to facilitate the semblance of certainty. This repression, though, is rarely recognised by the newly certain character as the act of will that it is, but regarded as the inspired and enlightened acceptance of a particular code of conduct; an act, therefore, which is externally sanctioned. The subtly mitigating self-mesmerism which this kind of false attribution facilitates is emblematic of the monologue's capacity to effectively *dissolve* bonds of community while purporting to uphold essential abstract moral concerns. Those deemed external to the monologist's cause are dehumanised, discredited or simply overlooked, in order to subordinate their concerns as inferior in a hierarchical moral context. Treating alien concerns as inferior or unreal, then, is often condoned when precedence is given to resuscitation of traditional or merely personally desired assurances as functions of monologic authority.

In the deportment of little-fausts and of dreamers, absolutist infatuation has, respectively, its fanaticism and its quietism. The unpregnant pause, however, reflects a state somewhere in-between the two, in which individuals neither sink into isolated fancy nor precipitously act out their desire for an authoritative conviction. In the unpregnant pause individuals consciously *endure* uncertainty, and though it is typically endured as a burden, this endurance contains the possibility of recognising that it is ambiguity, not some hidden ideal, which is the fundamental context which gives proportion and meaning to any human notion of absolute truth or certainty.

Emotivism and Monologues

I shall use the term "emotivism" in accordance with Alasdair MacIntyre's suggestion in *After Virtue*⁶³ that the failure of the direct meaning of the moral theory put forth by Moore, Stevenson, Duncan and Ramsey provided an indirect insight into the nature of secular moral discourse.

⁶² Goethe, *Faust – Part Two*, ln. 11539.

⁶³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

MacIntyre adapts emotivism as a term which indicates the attempt implicit in the overt project of Moore *et al.* of distinguishing between a language of verifiable moral absolutes and the merely emotive statements which often masquerade as moral absolutes. This attempt provides, MacIntyre suggests, a perfect example of what it seeks to eradicate from the category of moral utterance: it is essentially an attempt to salvage the notion of moral absolutes as a privileged and actual fund of pure concepts or information properly suited to a kind of moral philosophy which is founded in something more stable and more empirical than simply finite human interaction, choices and agreements.

In MacIntyre's realignment, emotivism implies the imposition or presumption of absolute discriminations in order to justify the utilisation of authoritative moral language to further the credibility of particular explanations of merely personal preferences, beliefs and actions. This imposition is variously wilful, wishful, unconscious and unsure, it reflects anxiety and a frustration with ambiguity, and esteem for authority both as an instinctive creative response and a reactionary longing. It reflects a condition of confusion about the status of moral and abstract distinctions.⁶⁴ Emotivist convictions, therefore, refer to convictions upheld or relied upon as if they represented an external absolute when in fact they have been unwittingly invested with the semblance of rational credibility and external authority to cater to individuals' dependence on the functions provided by an absolute certainty.

Emotivism, according to MacIntyre, inadvertently provides "a preliminary sketch of an empirical thesis, presumably to be filled out later by psychological and

⁶⁴ While Stevenson *et al.* provide a provocative example of an abstract system authorised by emotivism, in Nietzsche's work MacIntyre demonstrates a register of protest against persisting habits of objectively distinguishing unimpeachable moral guides (such as God had appeared to offer). Nietzsche attacked all conventional forms of certainty, MacIntyre explains, prompted by his own conviction that "what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will" (*After Virtue*, 113). While it is in Nietzsche's writings that this idea is perhaps most stridently, and sometimes most compellingly, asserted, traces of a similar awareness are apparent in the thought of both David Hume and John Stuart Mill.

A similar hostility to the superficially objective credibility which convention and necessity often afforded to conduct supported also by hollow rationales and bad faith was also a guiding intuition of the radical nihilist program of dismissing "principles". Radical nihilists react to a recognition of the inability to rationally discriminate sound and vital concepts from persuasive conventions which survive on merely emotional or contingent grounds by calling for the dismissal of all received ideas so that what *is* credible can thereafter re-establish itself unhindered. By contrast, therapeutic nihilism claims that, given the indecipherable mass of plausible but not unimpeachable beliefs, ethics and moral positions, no single path can be legitimately chosen without the prospect of choosing wrongly (under the influence of convention, emotion or simple ignorance) and therein, actively making things worse. One must, therefore, choose not to engage in attempts to solve what cannot be fully understood. In the early twentieth-century, members of the Vienna Circle began to extend this kind of abstract rigour to the use of language, arguing that abstract philosophical and conceptual discourse should limit itself to statements that are entirely clear and empirically verifiable to avoid the kind of vagueness which sustains deluded and improper convictions.

sociological and historical observations, about those who continue to use moral and other evaluative expressions, as if they were governed by objective and impersonal criteria, when all grasp of any such criterion has been lost".⁶⁵

The conditions for the prevalence of emotivism are those involving "a general implicit recognition in practice, though not in explicit theory, that claims to objectivity and impersonality cannot be made good".⁶⁶ As such, in the absence of a common authoritative body of moral terms, the everyday moral agreements made by people in relation to practical circumstances rely on the devices of emotive moral discourse to claim the privileges of apparent authority.

Where no commonly accepted virtues or moral codes exist, the guiding roles of a clear moral doctrine are taken up by the contingent appeals of strategies of eloquent persuasion. As a result, though, individuals tend to become isolated within the inwardly compelling but outwardly contestable authenticity of their abstract convictions (caught up in the particular symbols that assuage their particular anxieties and uncertainties) as they have no common standard with which to communicate their meaning. They do, however, have the capacity to attempt to communicate the circumstance and nature of the anxiety their symbols console, and therein to justify the credibility of their emotive standards. The desire to make sense to others remains. With the structure of morality fractured and lacking compelling common terms, the consoling work or assurance must rely on the persuasive presentation of its own implied "moral" code. Where esteem for authoritative moral conviction remains, though, the need to approve not merely the credibility but the authority of the emotive code tends to smother any willingness to make sense in agreement with others. This is the condition to which individuals who have committed themselves to the faustian compromise are condemned.

The sense of deprivation that typically weighs unacknowledged on emotivist moralities suggests the inability of finite beings to construct or discover authoritative assurance which can survive a clear awareness of the complex and ambivalent world. Such an assurance, nevertheless, remains the desired ideal and benchmark of emotivist moralities, encouraging individuals to discover in their emotional motivations the unimpeachable causality of an absolute authority. Subsequently the meaningfulness of these clusters of ethic, assurance and explicit causality (that is, a sense that "good"

This commitment resulted in the conscientiously ethical, and typically short-lived, "silence" (on matters where nothing 'certain' could be said) of some philosophers and artists.

⁶⁵ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 18.

⁶⁶ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 19.

actions can be relied on to produce consequences which can be deemed good) depends upon a type of conviction which appears implicitly confined to the individual whose emotions recognise their authority. While each individual celebrates their conviction's approximation of the shape of past Authority, the unimpeachable assurance they seek in these "clusters" can never exist, in its own terms, as more than a solipsistic pleasure.

This does not make these emotivist positions worthless as moral statements, but rather highlights, particularly in the celebratory devotion of those who approve them, the root of the problems caused by the incapacity of such convictions to provide the authoritative support emotivists expect from them. The problems emotivist idealism can engender stem from the friction between external objective fact and the untenable expectations that the emotivist accepts, with a kind of wilful credulity, as dispensations of an authoritative higher order.

Emotivism runs through the ostensibly abstract ideologies of the characters I shall focus on, generating and supporting their capacity to put faith in them and depend on the certainty they provide. This emotivist idealism is characterised by the modes of discourse and by the euphemistic circumstantial expressions of desire and protest, which absolutist requirements demand of secular idealism.

The idealists I shall focus on effectively use these terms as MacIntyre suggests, to express particular intuitions as if they were general abstract principles. The problems then arise when these individuals expect the general terms emotivists invest with their particular assurances to find accord in reality. As such, this thesis perhaps provides something of the historical, social and psychological exploration of the circumstances behind, and consequences of, these individuals' attempts (whether successful or not) "to use moral and other evaluative expressions, as if they were governed by objective and impersonal criteria".⁶⁷ I shall focus also on the way in which this expectation stores up for them a sense of betrayal by the world and by the ideals they cherish, and therein provokes them to distort or resent their relationship with reality, and to separate it from their relationship with their ideals.

By emotivist discourse I mean to imply the kind of rhetorical (or pseudo-logical) and attitudinal posture necessitated by individuals' compulsion to support convictions they have generated through the generalisation of their subjective and particular reactions to and approval of an assurance, or systems of assurance. These "Systems" tend to masquerade in pseudo-rational terms, and relationships of terms, which hide the fact

⁶⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 18.

that the assurances they provide depend on a selective over-simplification of the ambiguity and uncertainty of truth, purpose and conviction in the secular world.

The factitiousness of idealism, apparent in its inadequacy in the role intended for it in these characters' recourse to abstraction (as the blueprint of an absolute moral code or a perfect world), does not simply discredit it as solipsistic gibberish and a failure on its own terms, but suggests a different interpretative approach. As expressions which *attempt to order*, but in truth *express* uncertainty, idealisms ask to be read in relationship to the individuals who employ them, and the particular ends which, consciously or unconsciously, they have in mind. What emerges is a set of attitudes which, rather than re-establishing a common framework of moral verities, provides a recognisable pattern in which the experience of this absence, the implicit expression of being *unable* to effect this cohesion, is given an embryonic tradition and a role.

In both the unpregnant pause and the faustian compromise, rationalisations are revealed as fundamental to the construction of any transcendent secular certainty. This awareness is implicit in the terms of the unpregnant pause, a state in which externally authorised commitment seems unjustifiable and any pretence of absolute conviction therefore seems suspect of either ignorance or ignobility. While in the faustian compromise, it is apparent that idealistic activism is often facilitated through the rationalisation - effectively the *denial* - of facts, and their implications, which oppose the foundations of a favoured, ostensibly transcendent code. When depicted alongside or "in" the reality they aim to render, these rationalisations reveal motives and intentions which distort common meanings in order to artificially guarantee the survival of obsolete, though emotionally favoured, orientations to absolute truths.

Monologue sustains the faustian compromise, it is active also in the isolated solipsism which sustains dreamers in their unreality.

In articulating this notion of the monologue I shall be focusing on the way in which these characters' recourse to abstraction, and the psychological basis for the kind of "convictions" they depend on, reveal the self-isolating implications of seeking to resuscitate order and authority in the image of their desires and memories.

Monologic, as I shall use it, is a term which requires some explanation. A literal monologue is a relatively uncomplicated notion, the uninterrupted discourse of a single voice.⁶⁸ I am using "monologue" as a metaphorical term for a psychological or

⁶⁸ This simple root serves as the basis for Mikhail Bakhtin's differentiation between monologic and dialogic frames of meaning. At the heart of this distinction is the transition of abstract authority from

attitudinal state; while this state is often depicted through characters' literal monologues, my usage of the term embraces the initial condition of which these are particular symptoms. The disquiet of monologic habits reflects the inevitable burden experienced by individuals who, in an ambivalent reality, desire the kind of certain moral framework provided by faith in an external authority. The certainty the monologic individual constructs for themselves is fraught with its incompatibility with a world capable only of supporting flexible and relative gradations of moral choice.

An individual's monologue protects and perpetuates their purportedly objective or rational understanding of themselves and the world which has been formed around their needs and particular preferences, and around their desire or intellectual esteem for absolute certainty. The internally compelling incantation through which individuals make sense of the world on behalf of their authority reveals itself to the listener through its tone and omissions. In the monologue, the manifestation of a hostility to reality which is merely latent in solipsism, is necessitated by the monologic individual's need to enact their solipsistic convictions in some semblance of the actual world.

In the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's influential notion that Dostoevsky's novels promote or champion a move towards the disclosure of a dialogic scene it might be suggested that a focus on monologic tendencies perversely takes the perspectives of morbid, dislocated individuals as a source of clarity.⁶⁹ But the problem of individualistic isolation and inhibited empathy exists in its clearest form precisely at these extremes of disruption and over-compensation. The morbid extremes at which these characters exist reflect the crystallisation of corruptions which are incipient in, though denied by, convention.⁷⁰

what Bakhtin identifies as a "monoglotic" to a "polyglotic" state. In cultures dominated by a strict focal point of abstract moral and practical Authority, such as is embodied in the idea of an omnipotent God, there is effectively a single unchallenged source of the living Truth of that culture, a monoglotic foundation. Where many authorities, with equally contestable foundations and appeal, vie for recognition, approval or devotion, as in secular cultures, truth or authority is based on a polyglotic foundation. This differentiation is explained more extensively throughout "Epic and Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3-40)). For example: "In this actively polyglot world, completely new relationships are established between language and its object (that is, the real world) - and this is fraught with enormous consequences for all the already completed genres that had been formed during eras of closed and deaf monoglossia" ("Epic and Novel", 12).

⁶⁹ Bakhtin's influential discussion of Dostoevsky's "polyphonic" novels is contained primarily in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Bakhtin's original work first appeared in 1929.

⁷⁰ In *Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature* (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co. Publishers, 1958), Robert Louis Jackson notes how the Underground Man's interaction with Liza brings into relief "[t]he tragedy of the sentimental-romantic "dreamer", the tragic impact on others of the psychological experiment, the terrible havoc wrought by humiliated consciousness in its egotism of suffering" (37). What we see throughout Dostoevsky's later work is that these are not merely a phenomenon of the underground, and that Dostoevsky wished to show the tragic impact and the havoc

“*Contemporary man*. He avenges all the injuries which no one did him, nor thinks of doing him”.⁷¹

For Dostoevsky, nervousness, and a neurotically distempered perspective of the world, is the natural disposition of secular individualism. In the contemporary individualist he perceives a growing numbness to communal moral and spiritual interaction, just as he saw the broader social fragmentation and corrosion of a secularising, industrialising and Westernising society, embodied in the isolation *en masse* of urban populations.

Bakhtin’s dialogic viewpoint keeps him from fully registering the inertia which runs through individuals’ relationship to their monologues as devices of contingent compromise between reality and a desired self-image. The desirable shape of dialogic openness in Dostoevsky’s novels is revealed by the failings of the monologic self-image. It is through the consequences of this appetite for monologic self-assurance rather than through their instinctive resistance to external finalisation that Dostoevsky’s heroes appear ultimately to oppose the challenge implicit in the monologic visions of others.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin suggests that Dostoevsky’s heroes always resist the roles, or “other people’s words”, which, from their alien perspectives, others seek to impose.⁷² This makes of this resistance a far too specialised distinction. Not only the “heroes” (distinguished by their unorthodox relation to convention and the status quo), but the most parodically drawn minor buffoons are dominated by an impulse that resembles this intention. That it is frequently the source of such caricature does not, however, dismiss the significance of these exertions; their primary concern is not resistance but assertion. The “heroes” to whom Bakhtin refers are doing little more, in resisting the roles foisted on them, than exerting a preference for the authoritative status of their own ideals and self-conceptions; the “words” with which they give reality the semblance of a particular desired order.

they wreak to be incipient in any society based on the principles of secular individualism. What had reflected the habitual experiments of a particular type of individual, become the common recourse for the wider population who are forced to sacrifice themselves in service of something they cannot legitimately idealise. The urge to idealise, however, remains, reflecting the potency of idealisation as an instinctive recourse for dignifying existence with transcendent life-goals and meaning.

⁷¹ Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks 1860-81, volume III*, trans. Arline Boyer & Carl Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975), 133.

⁷² Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 59.

For Bakhtin, the resistance to other people's words suggests an intuition of the inadequacy of the ready-made truths which received roles impose. But in Dostoevsky's work it is commonly individuals' ambitions to self-determination, their preference for their own version of the world in exclusion of all others, that lead them to construe and experience these multiple perspectives in terms of challenge and potential sabotage. This is not the intuition of dialogue, it is the reflexive censorship on which the individual's authoritative monologue is founded. In *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre observes that the interactions superintended by the sense of emotive justification, rather than explanation,⁷³ of moral preferences are characteristically "shrill"; the monologue's arrogated burden of Authority turns other voices into challenges, and meets them as such. Dialogue is not characterised by resistance; the loss of illusions that is the standard outcome of experience in the novelistic scene results from the acceptance that every "voice" or truth is legitimately qualified by the multifacetedness it vies with.

Raskolnikov resists the dialogue that continues around him until it is no longer a threat to the vital foundations of his self-esteem. As the aspirations directed by his desired self-image shift gradually away from the criminal self, Raskolnikov's combative urge fades until the skin he must shed is sufficiently drained of meaning. For as long as they challenge his aspiration, Raskolnikov resists the words of Svidrigailov, Porfiry Petrovich, Dunya and Sonya. His own words are formed around a cliché, but as long as he identifies with it he fights for the cause (himself) which the cliché supports. Raskolnikov is redeemed only when he accepts these other versions into himself and affirms the dignity of an obligation to hear what others say.

In "Poor Folk" (1846) Makar Devushkin resists the version of himself which he finds in Gogol's "The Overcoat" and is both right and wrong to do so. Gogol's copyist, Akaky Akakievich, is revisited in Makar's characteristically unfulfilled existence, but Makar's aversion to this analogy reflects a tenacious resistance to its implication that he is helplessly determined by his circumstance, and that, as is the case for Akaky, no avenue of protest, control or free-will is available to him. Makar's aversion, then, reflects his compulsion to reject the veracity of a highly disturbing image of himself, in which the consolations he has managed to draw from his existence are designated, he feels, as merely further generic facets of an existence determined by his material

⁷³ This distinction between justification and explanation clarifies the difference between an awareness of the emotive particularities of individual moral preferences and relativism. The inter-relationship between any individual and their moral code does not exclude judgement, it merely requires that this relationship be interrogated and taken into account along with the judgements implicit in the responses of community and circumstance. By depicting or dramatising the nature of emotive techniques of self-representation,

circumstance. Makar's letters, his epistolary romance, and his entire inner-life are perhaps just the kind of meaningless copy-work with which Akaky also solaces himself. However, to see Makar's resistance to this external measure as entirely justified (accepting, therefore, that the implications of the analogy it imposes on him are entirely unwarranted), would dismiss much of the ambiguity which generates the interest in Makar's uncertainty of his own individualism and his uncertain commitment to it.

The brief mention of these deviations from Bakhtin's assertion reflects a common tension (which I shall return to in more detail in Chapter 7) between monologic inclinations and the recalcitrant influence of ambivalent facts (including the discrepant perceptions of others). Dostoevsky's novels are populated by a considerable number of minor characters who resist the roles assigned to them by the dialogic scene (in Bakhtin's sense). This population reflects Dostoevsky's commitment to depicting the spread of individualism and the way in which it encouraged people to act on the promptings of merely personal inclination or vanity. As well as the grandiose themes on which the novels urgently focus, the pervasive consequences of individualism's validation of self-interest warn against its highly disruptive influence on the mundane aspects of ordinary relationships and common domestic existences.

"White Nights" (1846), "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), "The Meek Girl" (1876) and *An Accidental Family* (1875) all contain overt pleas for open communication, a concern which remains a constant undertone throughout Dostoevsky's work. "Why", asks the dreamer in "White Nights",

... do even the finest people always seem to be hiding something from others and keeping quiet about it? Why should one not speak out directly, without delay, whatever is in one's heart, if one knows one isn't talking idly? The way things are at present, people look more stern than they really are, as though they were all afraid they might spoil the authenticity of their feelings if they were to display them too readily...".⁷⁴

This stern suppression of what they really feel (and Dostoevsky's "target" in depicting its consequences) originates in individuals' intuitions of the environment of social interaction: the shared arena of emotivist resistance and challenge requires that the simulated authority of monologue (and the fragile confidence it provides) need always be on guard against subjection to alternative truths or perspectives.

the author brings together motivations and consequences with the versions of morality they generate and reflect.

⁷⁴ Dostoevsky, "White Nights", *Uncle's Dream and Other Stories*, transl. David McDuff (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1989), 71-121, 109.

In *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863),⁷⁵ - a polemic full of satirical deflations and apocalyptic extrapolations of the individualism from which Dostoevsky considered the merely contingent moralities and superficial ideals of bourgeois Europe had stemmed - Dostoevsky began to clarify his conception that individualism necessarily involves and encourages an insensibility to the "information" about oneself which is latent in interaction with others.⁷⁶

The disruptions which emotivist authorities (such as Myshkin's abstract ethic of compassion and beauty or Don Quixote's belief in the rightness of a world ordered by chivalric conventions) inevitably suffer and contend with in ambivalent reality, do not suggest that the intentions that formed them are irrelevant, but simply that they can no longer call on metaphysical orientation as their bedrock of justification. They become a strange form of poetic or lyrical expression of an individual's orientation to an ambivalent world, rather than an objective means of discovering and committing to its essential system.

Though disrupting monologic allegiances to these individualistic constructions of absolutes, the reality of the natural world offers no particular revelation (such as a recommendation of polyphony, dialogic existence, or an order implicit in chaos). It simply provides, inherent in its ambivalent workings, the no less precious possibility of recognising the distortions, negligence and isolating selectivity which sustain monologic attitudes.

My interpretation of the tension which manifests between a character's monologic intention and the ambivalent world differs from Bakhtin's in the sense that his dialogic world (against which he judges monologues as if they were clouds blotting out the sun) suggests an inhuman place, or a utopian vision, but not a pertinent reality. Monologues express a desire for authority which can be read not as the obstacle to dialogic awareness, but ultimately as an inherently confused act of personal orientation to the uncertainty which this relativistic, supposedly pregnant with "dialogic" awareness, scenario is actually experienced as. This is particularly apparent in Clough's depictions of the unravelling of his characters' unwittingly received habits of subjectively approving desired authority under the guise of seeking (and finding) it externally. That the results of such personal protests against uncertainty *are* sometimes treated as transcendent authorities, reflects a particular dimension of the type of protest which forms them: these particular protests are founded on an ideological bedrock of

⁷⁵ Dostoevsky, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. David Patterson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997).

absolutism, a foundation from which individuals seem able to consider transcendent moral imperatives only as rigid general rules, abstracted from (and blissfully unconcerned with) human particularity and circumstantial contingencies.

Subsequent to the loss of such a commonly accepted fund of external authority (such as the death of God), individuals' attempts to sustain the assurances associated, perhaps somewhat nostalgically, with an accepted absolute framework of purpose and virtue necessarily involve them in strategic and selective relationships with ambivalent reality and others. By selectively approving aspects of reality which support or privilege an individuals' subjectively idealised 'authorities' over rival systems and recalcitrant fact, monologues enable individuals to believe in the absolute authority of their moral frameworks. Monologues facilitate worldviews in which individuals' preferential truths appear, to them, rather as the dictates of an external authority. Simultaneously, though, monologues require that discrepant elements of reality be repudiated or simply denied, a requirement that results in a kind of unwitting conceptual incarceration within the particulars and the false absolutism of the desired ideal.

And yet, while the plausibility of a shared monologic ordering of the common world has dissipated, the propensities which sustained it so readily, and which were in turn perhaps nourished and reinforced by it, persist in the absolutist conceptual deportment of individuals in the ambiguous finite world. And for similar reasons, habits of monologic reassurance persist also in the form of the affirmations by which dialogic awareness is frequently sanctified. This is perhaps because at a fundamental level, individuals who seek or are compelled to understand and express (even if just for himself or herself) moral codes and life-goals that might transcend merely circumstantial considerations, continue to experience anxieties which render them susceptible to the assurances and support they associate with patterns of absolute authority, even though the value of these patterns has become highly dubious.

⁷⁶ See in particular "An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois", *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 43-52.

CHAPTER 3 – Some Consequences of Moral Confusion

Whose Sound Centre?

Masao Miyoshi, in *The Divided Self*, attributes to Clough and Arnold the role of revealing the inefficacy of the “Victorian conversion” which had sought to heal the divided self and resolve Romantic indeterminacy with “a moral view of art as of life”.¹ In the works of Clough particularly, the significant problem of what one *ought* to do is considered and depicted, free of any special pleading, in relation to the ambiguities, disruptions and desires spawned by a moral scene which seemed suddenly to lack any governing authority. Though many poets and novelists in the period wrestled with metaphysical uncertainties in their work, in Clough’s writing uncertainty seems least tampered with: attempts factitiously to resolve ambiguities are relentlessly disrupted; uncertainty is given its head where others often make a show of taming it.²

Conductors of monologues create and sometimes purvey versions of themselves, and their frequent awareness of this fact introduces the dimension of implicit dialogue

¹ Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York University Press; London: University of London Press, 1969), 107.

² The endeavour of Browning’s and Tennyson’s early works requires an order or meaning, the revelation of which is the impulse of the work. In Tennyson’s work in particular this desire to reveal involves a kind of faux ambiguity being ritually trounced on cue by a revived faith. Browning and Tennyson appear unable, for aesthetic and ideological reasons, to admit an ambiguous collection of possibilities as a suitable creative platform. In “The Two Voices” (published 1842, written 1833), for instance, Tennyson’s stage-managing presence disrupts the surface of the poem’s Socratic procedure. Tennyson’s guiding hand and subjective interest can be seen forging the poems’ contentions into a capricious synthesis, and the two voices to be involved in the assertion of dialogue and resolution, rather than the representation of conflicting reactions to an ambiguity. In the spirit of the Victorian conversion, Tennyson’s genuine experience of ambiguity, doubt, or loss of consensus, leads to impatience and a determined siding with his moral self (which has been sanctified on utilitarian and didactic principles). Tennyson’s dialogues of the mind with itself are consequently unconvincing; they are not genuine representations of multiplicity but rhetorical concessions to an atmosphere hostile to the moral certainty he wishes to generate. Browning’s awareness of a similar constriction, Miyoshi suggests, is responsible for the stilted and unmanageable relationship between aesthetic form and psychological veracity in his earlier works. Browning’s early poetry could not gracefully or even adequately contain the intellectual necessities required to overcome the infinitely receding and therefore inherently elusive character of the first-person expression of a point of authority. However, with the dramatic monologue, suggests Masao Miyoshi, Browning “finally caught on to his true form”, one that would enable him to write free from a poetically disruptive fidelity to the fluctuations of multi-faceted truth (*The Divided Self*, 203). Browning found his way around this quagmire of genuine confusion without resorting to factitious “solutions” or false confidence by representing, in his “dramatic monologues”, the fragmented subjectivity of secular inspirations and convictions within their own self-constructed frames of independent explanation and meaning. “With so many masks to put on the poet is not personally involved with any one of them. He is released from the struggle with doubt and belief, and can concentrate on form” (203). It seems necessary to note, in clarification of Miyoshi’s suggestion, that any release from personal involvement which the dramatic monologue provides, is partial; the distance it asserts between author and the voice in the poem is a technique which is available to complement other elements of characterisation or the dramatisation of concepts in the poem. It seems unwise to discount the poet’s personal involvement in any work, regardless of whether or not his or her words are attributed to another.

between the self creating and the self created.³ Of the two people present in “Bishop Blougram’s Apology”, only one participant speaks: Gigadibs, Blougram’s interlocutor, “played with spoons, explored his plate’s design,/ And ranged the olive-stones about its edge”. He seems to sense that his importance to the monologue has little to do with any actual input he might muster. At the end of his address Bishop Blougram is in a self-congratulatory mood: ‘On the whole,’ he thought, ‘I justify myself / On every point where cavillers like this/ Oppugn my life’. In partial agreement with this sentiment, a narrative voice reflects that “the great bishop rolled him out a mind/ Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.”. Blougram does justify himself, but only *to* himself; his monologue takes issue only with his own interpretation of Gigadibs’ position. So Blougram’s address attempts to effect the exclusive triumph of monologue. The internal dialogue which it expresses mistakenly experiences its own *sense* of the conflict of other voices as legitimate dialogue. Answering the challenges he seems to expect from Gigadibs, Blougram acknowledges, absorbs and defuses potentially disruptive contentions and thereby revivifies his convictions. That Blougram is compelled to absolve himself in this fashion reflects the profoundly insecure character of his monologic authority. Such monologues are not the impervious, self-assuredly proffered essences of subjective beings; they are individuals’ attempts to validate the sense they make to themselves as being worthy of external approval. Within their subjectivity they register the challenge of a multiplicity of alternative propositions. Bishop Blougram, for instance, conducts the argument both for and against his conduct; Gigadibs, while not a double, is a source of opposition against which Blougram needs to justify himself. In spite of Blougram’s protestations as to the effortlessness of his position and his easy conscience, it is definitely his own needs that motivate him.

In *Culture and Anarchy* (1868) Matthew Arnold observes:

... not only do we get no suggestions of right reason, and no rebukes of our ordinary self, from our governors, but a kind of philosophical theory is widely

³ Prior to the plainly deluded manifestation of Don Quixote’s enthusiasm for chivalric conduct, his interest reflects a fixation with a style of being he feels is more suited to the being he feels himself to be. His devotion transcends material concerns - “[Don Quixote] sold many acres of corn-land to buy these books of chivalry to read” (*Don Quixote*, trans. J.M.Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950), 31) - but this devotion is to what? “ ‘I know who I am,’ replied Don Quixote, ‘and I know, too, that I am capable of being not only the characters I have named, but all the Twelve Peers of France and all the Nine Worthies as well, for my exploits are far greater than all the deeds they have done, all together and each by himself’ ” (54). I know who I am, which seems to say, “I know my value”, and it is equal to the value he places on the “authentic history” of chivalric romance. His delusions are the assertion of an inner logic conflating self-esteem and desire into a belief in an entitlement which, like Madame Bovary’s world-shrinking ambition, chafes against the contingency of circumstance.

spread among us to the effect that there is no such thing at all as a best self and a right reason having claim to paramount authority, or, at any rate, no such thing ascertainable and capable of being made use of; and that there is nothing but an infinite number of ideas and works of our ordinary selves, and suggestions of our natural taste for the bathos, pretty nearly equal in value, which are doomed either to an irreconcilable conflict, or else to perpetual give and take.⁴

This is the state of social interaction to which Arnold attributes the necessary project of establishing “a sound centre of authority”.⁵ The “infinite number of ideas” which are “pretty nearly equal in value”, given that they all issue from “ordinary selves”, are ideally to be governed by right reason and the superior intuitions of the best self. Right reason and the best self are to be attained through the enlightenment of culture; they constitute Arnold’s attempt to resuscitate an absolute authority capable of overcoming the stagnation implied by the equality and mere adequacy of ordinary selves.

Arnold suggests that the path of wisdom is to accept the “give and take” of a compromise with what *is*; the path of uncompromising individualism, however, leads to conflict.⁶ Compromise is precisely what monologue cannot attain; its recourse then is shrill assertiveness or silence. Gigadibs’ silence and subsequent decampment for a new world reacts against the exclusive and stagnant essence of Blougram’s policy. Gigadibs’ emigration also suggests a reactionary variation on Blougram’s domineering authority, Gigadibs evades the unpleasant implications of an argument which he is unable authoritatively to refute. In reporting Gigadibs’ indirect rejoinder, Browning nevertheless subjects the intent of Blougram’s internal self-manipulation to the contestable nature of its effect, insinuating the isolating divisiveness of the authority it asserts. A suggestive project is thereby included in Browning’s poem beyond the revelation of Blougram’s self-distorting special pleading on behalf of an entrenched but unsatisfactory ideal. The project is implied by our own sense of the desirability of a genuine dialogue as opposed to the characteristically shrill discourse which MacIntyre (in *After Virtue*) identifies as the standard interchange of emotivist self-justification. Blougram is smug rather than shrill, his position allows him the comfort of a benevolent disdain for the “ideologies” which might otherwise challenge and prompt him to aggressive proselytising.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 119-20.

⁵ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 119.

⁶ Nevertheless, it is perhaps the latter path which leads Arnold to his faith in right reason and the best self; his own inspirations stem from a form of idealistic conflict with a reality which he deems essentially delinquent in its deviation from what he considers an Ideal.

In *The Historical Novel*,⁷ Georg Lukács suggests that the “inclusion of the dramatic element in the novel, the concentration of events, the greater significance of dialogue, i.e. the direct coming-to-grips of colliding opposites in conversation, these are intimately linked with the attempt to portray historical reality as it actually was, so that it could be both humanly authentic and yet be re-livable by the reader of a later age”.⁸ The humanly authentic and re-livable representation achieved in dialogue succeeds on two levels: firstly, through the insistence on the importance of registering the influential role of individuals experiencing and registering specific situations from a position of spontaneous uncertainty; and secondly, in the procedural form, which offers a form accessible to the reader’s re-living, involving them similarly in the ambiguous procedure of coming-to-grips with the particular circumstances. But this success is a persuasive or aesthetic effect; it depends on the plausibility of its representations, some persuasive induction of empathy, not on their essential accuracy.

The “dialogue” to which Lukács refers conceivably includes letter writing, journals, diaries, notes and even monologues of a certain kind, and contains and conveys both the separate activities and the conflict between acknowledged and unrecognised, or denied, influences which affect individuals attempts and desires to discover a satisfying order in the world.⁹

The individual delivering a monologue frequently plays a further considerable role as audience, present behind the overt pleas which their monologue privileges. By the mere fact of the speaker’s consciousness, monologues unavoidably register the presence of other voices. It is in regard to its treatment of these voices (present in the manner and fact of the address) that a monologue can be considered actively exclusive (triumphant so to speak) or otherwise. Similarly, where monologue stands for a type of relationship to reality, the individual who depends on this relationship is simultaneously *tending* it. In order to maintain a selective vision in a multifaceted world the individual’s attributions, perceptions and understanding must be plastic and dynamic.

⁷ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, transl. Hannah & Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

⁸ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 40.

⁹ In *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Jerome McGann suggests an analogous pattern of fertile tension between the inaccessible particularities of past historical moments or epochs and the contemporary perspective which addresses them. This tension is a potential source of a ‘coming to grips’ with the respective illusions and prejudices which underlie any subjective interpretation of history, as of transcendent truths. A mutually clarifying comparison of discrepant historical moments allows the idiosyncratic blindspots (determined by culture, nationality, etc.) both of the historical ‘eye-witness’ perspectives and of the individuals attempting to analyse them in the present to appear in mutual relief as otherwise inexplicable discontinuities in a shared historical sequence. Precisely in the discrepancies and discords of the respective cultural illusions

The underground man, for instance, registers the contribution of other voices in order to retune them to his own leading string; it is as a matter of strategic stylisation of reality that he allows this contact. The dialogue (as a metaphor for moral agreement), and equally the dialogue of the mind with itself, avoids such selectivity and the necessary distortions it induces by remaining open to the variety and complexity of ambivalent reality.

Tennyson's apparently dialogic poems, for example, often belie their determination to forge and affirm the unified conviction of a monologue; they attempt to conquer doubts and ambiguities by allowing them to speak in order to ritually dismiss them. However, in the instances where this striving meets with failure, the strategy becomes apparent and the dialogic relationship re-emerges, encompassing Tennyson, his depictions, and the rhetorical effect that he aims to evoke.

It is hard to avoid the feeling that Tennyson's depictions of doubt or duality are underpinned by a certainty such as that which sustains the outcast of "Locksley Hall" (1842) - "Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs".¹⁰ Many of Tennyson's dialogues and poems of doubt lack the unfixed capacity, exemplified in Clough's best works, to convincingly register ambiguity rather than record the traces of its resolution. From within the solipsism of Dipsychus and Claude, Clough records the fluid coming to grips that takes place in the open-ended dialogue of the mind with itself, and clearly instates uncertainty as the true first principle and essence of any attempt to dismiss it.

Of course Tennyson is certainly not alone in utilising this rhetorical uncertainty. The path from doubt to conviction is a necessarily emotive one and requires, therefore, an evocation of the problematic ambiguities which demand equivocation.¹¹

Nevertheless, where certainty takes unconscious or emotional priority over precision, special pleading is allowed to proceed as objective fact. Whether deliberately or otherwise such a preferential vision suggests (accurately) an affiliation to the wishful

something of the underlying nature of both is made more evident. McGann links his theory to the inspiration and influence of the Nineteenth-Century German critic, Heinrich Heine.

¹⁰ Alfred Tennyson, "Locksley Hall", *The Poems of Tennyson in three volumes, Volume Two*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987), 118-30, ln.137. While published in 1842, the poem was written during 1837 and 1838.

¹¹ Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* effects a similar rise from the depths, with the chaos, doubt and sorrows that culminate in "The Everlasting No" ultimately becoming the emotional context for "The Everlasting Yea". "I too could now say to myself", writes Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, "Be not a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce!" (*Sartor Resartus* and *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, (London: Dent, 1908), 148). Similarly, in Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, a vivid, thorough and convincing depiction of the symbolic forces of doubt is put into service by Anthony's heedless affirmation as a measure of the strength and nature of his faith. "Temptation" is the device through which the eventual affirmation is provided with emotive roots and a background of critical awareness.

manipulations evident, for instance, in overtly escapist or ideological art. This rhetorical ploy achieves its end by controlling alternative or challenging perspectives and redeploying them to the individual's (whether a character or an author) preferences.

Etiquette

The heroism of unbelief appealed to many Victorians as the characteristic posture of their mature independence from a paternalistic religion.¹² Often, this heroism amounted to little more than the sanctification of the social crystallisations of Christian morality which persisted in the practical organisation of ordinary life. The lost assurance of a divine parent is compensated for by the notion of having gained a mature independence; humanity, it implies, has simply outgrown faith rather than deprived of it. Interestingly, in resorting to an over-scrupulous idealism (which celebrates the character of a lost authority as well as the individual's prior allegiance to it by refusing to compromise in its absence), the heroism of unbelief can be seen to be erecting its own emotional stays. A situation ensues whereby alternatives must measure up to the exacting reverence of and nostalgic devotion to a once grand idea. The need for divine assurances was assuaged for some by seeing the progress afforded by human reason and science, and the growing control of human technology over the uncertainties and threats implicit in the natural world, as indisputable evidence of the moral health of the social conventions which facilitated these improvements. Those who doubted the moral mandate of progress, such as Arnold, revived the standard goal of idealism which the efficacy-based propriety of *laissez-faire* politics could leave unstated. Arnold's response to Clough's persistent refusal to settle his conscience on a fixed idea and commit to it gives an example of the essentially emotional relationship between individual and ideology.

¹² In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche discusses this tendency: the English, he suggests, having gotten "rid of the Christian God", subsequently felt "obliged to cling all the more firmly to Christian morality In England, in response to every little emancipation from theology one has to reassert one's position in a fear inspiring manner as a moral fanatic" (*Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), 80). In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor associates the heroism of unbelief with "the deep spiritual satisfaction of knowing that one has confronted the truth of things, however bleak and unconsoling" (404). Taylor lists Samuel Putnam's protest against the "cry of the child against the night" and the "coward's sentimentality", Charles Eliot Norton's caution against the sin of "insincere profession", and Thomas Huxley's condemnation of superficial religious conformity for the sake of personal advantage (404-05). Behind these kinds of warning are underpinned by a common feeling that fidelity to a supernatural God had become a childish superstition which, having become inhibitive even undignified, must be put aside. The Spirit taunts Dipsychus with a challenge along similar lines, where the pleasures and comforts of being God's children are implicitly disparaged in relation to the virtue and dignity of consenting to make-do with the harsher more naked truth of humanity's spiritual isolation:

From the same spiritual and social milieu Arnold and Clough perceive the same implications.¹³ But in order to believe that the moral equality of all ordinary selves (as opposed to selves that have become aligned with the standards of right reason) reflects a fall for which atonement can be made, Arnold needs to believe that human ideals *can* serve as higher authorities. For Clough, though, no single governor or guide warrants absolute approval; the possibility of a prescriptive path towards unilateral moral enlightenment is not, therefore, something he can approve. The characters in Clough's narrative poems, however, find themselves precariously balanced between a comforting allegiance to the promised sequence which idealisms traditionally provide, and a dawning awareness of the inability of these assurances to counter the challenges, implicit in secular and worldly reality, that what they consider the legitimate lineage of their aspirations is merely the inflation of "ancient real facts to modern unreal dreams".¹⁴ Nietzsche's commitment to philosophy with a hammer, and his rhetorical barrages against the general tendencies of idealistic individuals' distorting appetite for absolute conviction, offer a dramatic crystallisation of currents which, in both Clough's and Dostoevsky's work, remain subtly intertwined with a persisting reluctance or inability to smash these philosophically obsolete traditions, conventions and attitudes.

"Maturer optics don't delight / In childish dim religious light: / In evanescent vague effects / That shirk not face one's intellects" (1.5.104-07).

¹³ Religion, suggests Arnold in "The Study of Poetry" (*Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1938, 1-33), has become a matter of proof, "it has attached its emotion to the fact"; it has sought to defend its authority by claiming its privileged grasp of the facts of divine order (1). In so doing, he implies, religion has marginalised the essential role of its poetic appeal, and with its factual authority failing, its authority has begun to flounder. Arnold claims that what had been the special potency of religion, the comforts of mystery and spiritual profundity, will persist in secular poetry to "interpret life for us", "console us", and "sustain us" (2), even without the overtly binding purpose implied in the recognition of serving an authority. "The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken [religion and philosophy] seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge" offered to us by poetry" (2). Philosophy and religion become dimensions of poetry and poetry takes on the duties previously fulfilled by the philosopher and the priest. In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold makes the extension of his claims, from "poetry" to culture, clear. In this extension, cultural activity becomes somehow detached from the individual human minds that pursue it and offers them something otherwise unavailable. Arnold appears to effect a repositioning of the external wisdom of religion into the finite cultural product of secular communities; therein he gives little heed, though, to the problems, ambiguities, and profound disquiet which cultural artefacts frequently evade or factitiously resolve or pacify. His own earlier poems which reflected such problematic conditions were disowned as un-needful; Arnold's exclusion of "Empedocles on Etna" from the collected poems of 1853 is a spectacle of the kind of distorting commitment to self-consciously purposive literature, which its role as part of a secular scripture potentially induces. It is this kind of earnestly prescriptive attitude towards the role of culture and literature in a world without given external values that prompted Arnold's promotion of the study of contemporary literature at University level. With culture serving as the secular fund of moral edification the Universities become institutions fitted, among other things, to the exploration of the secular spiritual life it expresses.

¹⁴ Clough, *Dipsychus and The Spirit*, 2.4.115.

Recalling, in *Sources of the Self*,¹⁵ the declaration of Nietzsche's fool that "God is dead", and its evocative dissipation of the landmarks of human orientation to a divine authority, "who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon"¹⁶, Charles Taylor suggests that the primarily intellectual timbre of this recognition of having lost a horizon of meaningful existence "undoubtedly corresponds to something very widely felt in our culture".¹⁷ The correspondence to which Taylor alludes is "the sense that no framework is shared by everyone", and, therefore, that no framework can "sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact".¹⁸ *Sources of the Self* essentially traces the development of this correspondence. Taylor's observation that it is a "commonplace about the modern world" that traditional frameworks have become "highly contested" and effectively "discredited or downgraded to the status of personal predilection", and his characterisation of moral seekers who "develop their own versions" of frameworks,¹⁹ imply a similarly common, though less commonplace, problem for the moral questor in relation to the involvement of other people (potentially each with a divergent vision of "moral" activity) in their idiosyncratic version of "the good".

When moral seekers go "beyond the gamut of traditionally available frameworks", they devise frameworks through "idiosyncratic combinations of or borrowings from or semi-inventions within" the postures suggested by tradition.²⁰ In 1876 Dostoevsky wrote: "Indeed, I keep thinking that we have begun the epoch of universal "dissociation." All are dissociating themselves, isolating themselves from everyone else".²¹ The consequence, as "everybody sets aside all those things that used to be common to our thoughts and feelings",²² is that "there is scarcely anything about which we can agree morally".²³ The dispersal of abstract moral discussion from a

¹⁵ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), sect. 125, 181. Nietzsche's lantern-bearing madman goes on to express the uncertainties which define existence in this horizon-less universe, "Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing?" (*The Gay Science*, sect.125, 181).

¹⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 17.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 17.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 16.

²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 17.

²¹ Dostoevsky, "Dissociation", *A Writer's Diary - Volume I, 1873-1876*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (London: Quartet, 1994), 394. The symptoms Dostoevsky associates with this phenomena of modern individualism resemble the symptoms – *ie.* isolation, separation, false confidence in individual convictions, and mutual latent hostility – of the "new trichinae" which Raskolnikov dreams of in jail (*Crime and Punishment*, 547).

²² "Dissociation", 394.

²³ "Dissociation", 395.

common core, such as divine authority, engenders highly contestable individual moral predilections which both Taylor and MacIntyre represent as a particular problem of modern moral discourse. In announcing what appeared to them the inception of this dissociation, both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche crystallise a moral dilemma which remains pertinent (as it had been sporadically in the preceding centuries²⁴).

In Clough's and Dostoevsky's depictions of disoriented moral seekers, the capacity of individuals to take charge of, and responsibility for, their actions is often fraught by an awareness of the unavoidable and improper influence of self-interest, and by habitual emotional needs for channels into which to deflect or disperse enough of their ultimate accountability to enable them to commit to inherently dubious positions of belief or conviction (as all such positions must be without an authoritative external directives).

In its compelling reflections of the finite and flawed, but also flexible, reality of moral interaction, Dostoevsky's work contextualises the repercussions of this persistence and involves them in the concrete drama of individual existences. The loss of biblical authority and divine credibility frequently prompts recourse to the external signs available in literature, nature, statistics, science and, occasionally, numerology. Where Augustine had randomly opened his Bible for "guidance", nineteenth century intellectuals look to Pushkin, Shakespeare, an Eagle in the sky or Masonic soothsaying. This availability is activated by need; it suggests an instinctive diffusion of the kind of problematic personal responsibility which, conscientiously weighing up choices and consequences, engenders the objectively unresolvable uncertainty of the unpregnant pause. The decisions these signs validate are inevitably pre-chosen or, at their most obscure, unconsciously desired. This diffusion rarely stands up to the consequences of the action it facilitates, it seems a ritual of permission and an inoculation against over-scrupulous equivocation. Rather than the standardised devotions advocated by Matthew Arnold's religion of culture, these reflect a superficial recourse to individually approved

²⁴ Similar patterns of sceptical disillusion relating to prevailing conventions of moral activity and the social order they underwrite are clearly apparent in, for instance, many of Shakespeare's plays (particularly his later works), as well as in those of his Elizabethan and Jacobean peers (the role of the malcontent in relation to contemporary moral habits, conveys many analogous problems of the relativity of truth, convention, selfless moral good and ambitious self-serving). The contentious nature of truth, belief and worldly convention were also prevailing concerns of the English Augustans and also some of their French contemporaries, such as Voltaire and Diderot. In many nineteenth century depictions of atheists by conscience, Voltaire is commonly gestured to as a potential origin of intellectual influence. Voltaire and Diderot stand at the start of a discernible sequence of increasingly sceptical approaches to the notion of humanity's subordination to a divine authority, which can be seen to have reached a kind of critical mass in Nietzsche's declaration of God's death. The sceptical approach of the English Augustans to conventions of belief and morality, is exacerbated by a suspicion, particularly apparent in writers like

touchstones conveying the impression of a recognisable external moral structure. The impression of objectivity is the most important function of this subjectivist appeal. This determinism is readily shed or sacrificed when unexpected consequences arise. It is Raskolnikov's attempt to validate the "external" justifications for his crime which becomes the fundamental contention in his ultimately unsuccessful disavowal of moral culpability.

The path from god's death to the proposition that "all is permitted" is absurd, but this absurdity merely reflects the desolation experienced as the extreme validations of a meaningful and dignifying subjection are dissolved. The proposition does not reflect a disinterested response; it expresses a feeling (underpinned sometimes with bitter resentment, and sometimes with devilish glee) of having been abandoned or betrayed to the wild lawlessness of an unjust, chaotic and meaningless world.

Similarly, Alyosha's reaction to the stench that emerges from the Elder Zosima's decaying corpse exemplifies how such sudden despair, of experiencing the indifference or remoteness of a supposedly just and merciful God, exists in a delicate balance with the great expectations nurtured by extreme faith. Alyosha's disillusion suggests the following feeling: if an individual who has been so widely acknowledged and revered as pre-eminently holy can be allowed to enter the afterlife without his virtues marked or verified by any sign of God's approval, and marked only, furthermore, as simply a material body, subject to the ambivalent laws of nature, how can we ever know whether the values we idealise are worthy of more than worldly esteem. How that is, can we ever receive any verification that what appear transcendent ideals to us are also pleasing to their supposed source; he is deflated, rather than really disillusioned, by the realisation that no signs or responses will be forthcoming.

In the second stanza of "*Hymnos ahymnos*" (1851),²⁵ Clough implies that the language available as the currency of prayer implicates and perpetuates a status, and therefore a type, of address.

O thou that in our bosoms' shrine
Dost dwell because unknown divine
I thought to speak, I thought to say
'The light is here,' 'behold the way'
'The voice was thus' and 'thus the word,[]'
And 'thus I saw' and 'that I heard,'

Swift and Johnson, of the corrupting influences of populism; this suspicion adds to the urgency apparent in their desires to protect or reassert salient and vital, rather than passively received, moral standards.

²⁵ Clough, "*Hymnos ahymnos*", *Clough: Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1995), 272-73.

But from the lips but half essayed
The imperfect utterance fell unmade.
(ln.9-16).

The received rhetorical postures, with their inherent orientation to a particular devotional purpose, impose limitations on the nature of religious expression. These limitations, sustained by precedent rather than persisting relevance, reinforce a lasting affinity for an obsolete and unrequitable subordination to spiritual authority. The address is futile - "I will not prate with 'thus' and 'so' / And be profane with 'yes' and 'no' ". The reason for this refusal is conveyed in the first stanza

O thou whose image in the shrine
Of human spirits dwells divine
Which from that precinct once conveyed
To be to outer day displayed
Doth vanish, part, and leave behind
Mere blank and void of empty mind
Which wilful fancy seeks in vain
With casual shapes to fill again –
(ln.1-8).

The dissatisfaction implicit in this stanza reflects a state of change, it is contextualised by its relationship (*ie.* its difference) to a prior, more assured and less isolating relationship between individuals and rituals of devotion to some spiritual authority or transcendent ideal. This comparative approach foregrounds the importance of the individual perspectives - incorporating their expectations, preferences and habits which are confronted by a necessity of change. The problems of generating terms of devotion to transcendent ideals or spiritual authority which are individually satisfactory, but more than solipsistically meaningful and not simply repetitions of redundant patterns of devotion reflect the obsolescence of previously authoritative patterns of individual deference to a common framework of morality and life-goals. This obsolescence also determines a shift of expressions of 'truth', 'good' or conviction from terms or attitudes which relate to commonly accepted and authoritative practices, to terms through which individuals, and groups of individuals, attempt to discover ideals capable of providing and supporting valid morals and life-goals. "*Hymnos ahymnos*" approves a kind of abstinence from moral postures, or ideological self-assertions, both in conscientious objection to hollow and essentially redundant rituals of conviction, and in resistance to the mere "casual shapes" that threaten to fill the void left by divine authority.

“*Hymnos ahymnos*”, like “Easter Day, Naples, 1849”, expresses a sense of dissatisfied isolation in response to the sudden loss of external validation (whether by a god who hears, or a community who share common ideals) that had seemed assured in the common language of prayer or devotion.

The desire for a communal ideal remains the undercurrent of almost every ‘new certainty’ from utilitarianism to nihilism. With the symbolic language of the community of man under God discredited, the idealistic individual’s persisting desire and approval of “community” seems unable to recognise in itself its own justification, and struggles to find means of expression in valid common terms.

Where an authoritative and common moral frame no longer exists, attaining a feeling of ‘communion’ or of being understood (a feeling which is vital for individuals who are compelled to experience their subjective moral instincts as externally authoritative) requires the petitioning of problematically autonomous others. To control and qualify the results of such dangerously random supplication, though, the suitability of these others can be ‘judged’ by the individual. Where individuals believe that their own worldview reflects an authoritative truth, their pseudo-objective judgements of the suitability of others’ responses to this worldview often serve merely to validate approval or dismiss opposition. As in “The Meek Girl”, in which Dostoevsky’s pawnbroker seeks to synthesise the absolute legitimacy of the “casual shapes” of his own “wilful fancy” out of the essentially ambivalent and amorphous reality which confronts him, a kind of stand-off ensues. He cannot accept reality, and reality cannot approve his criticisms and protests against its ambivalence.

“Benevolent silence, of course...” – Some motives, habits and effects of individualistic monologue.

“The Meek Girl” (1876) is introduced as the private counsel of a husband whose wife has “committed suicide a few hours earlier”, and, “is now lying on the table”. Dostoevsky explains to the reader, “this is neither a story nor a set of diary notes”.²⁶ The husband is confused, he is the kind of man who talks to himself. The narrative, neither story nor diary, is his interior monologue, undertaken in the presence of his wife’s dead body, through which he is “*trying to make sense*” of what has happened, and to this end also how and why.

²⁶ Dostoevsky, “The Meek Girl”, 253.

The strict focus of the pawnbroker's narrative allows the cause, methods and effects of an individual's devotion to their own monologue to manifest in vivid extremes. The particulars of his history suggest conditions more commonly diluted but no less present in the motivations and methods of individualistic ideological interaction with ambivalent reality (as exemplified by the rationales of Raskolnikov's ideological crime²⁷).

The Pawnbroker explains: "I had arrived as it were from a higher world: I was, at any rate, a retired second-grade captain from a distinguished regiment, a gentleman by birth, independent, etcetera".²⁸ His esteemed place has been denied him, but he prefers to walk the streets than to work as a civilian. This wilful disassociation from his former sphere is an act of profound reverence for the hierarchy that has dismissed him. Because he accepts its authority, but can't accept its judgement of *him*, his necessary rejoinder is to segregate himself from what he considers his proper place, and then through the meek girl, to forge a new standard against which he can verify (and exult in) his feelings of innocent persecution. The pawnbroker has fallen from his ideal, but is unwilling to acknowledge his 'fall' either as pertaining essentially to him or as having stemmed from his own actions.

Subsequent to any insult to their ideal the individualistic idealist is required to take up arms (rhetoric and rationalisations) and defend their right to the core presumptions and tenets which affirm their self worth (*ie.* as an idealist). What follows is a greater conviction of the need to assert one's rights and champion the legitimacy of one's subjective idealisations against a reality deemed intrinsically immoral, unfair and even "false" for its recalcitrant disruption of expected assurances.

The "sense" the pawnbroker is trying to *make* is clearly founded on rhetorical rather than absolute conviction. Rather than objective clear sightedness into previously ambiguous causes, the pawnbroker's "sense" is more akin to a subtle self-justifying casuistry, which aims ultimately at attaining the feeling of certainty by effectively denying its strategies to itself.

Similarly, the significance of the *desire* to make sense should not be forgotten in the face of the objective validity which the conclusion, with its tone of apocalyptic revelation, claims for itself. The pawnbroker's final posture is nourished by the same sense of noble distinction that drove his initial posture of martyred virtue to begin with. The terms have changed from those imposed by the intentions of the initial version: his

²⁷ I shall explore Raskolnikov's compromised relationship with the ambiguities of ambivalent reality in later chapters dealing specifically with *Crime and Punishment*.

necessary and 'benevolent' silence is ended, but (as noted above) *rationalisation* dominates his 'confession'.

As the pawnbroker's hidden motivations come to light, his confession ostensibly reveals a quest for meaning or sense which, believing itself committed to truth, is thoroughly distorted by its inability to transcend its need to authorise a personal predilection. In the absence of common moral terms, a particular type of moral self-expression manifests: influenced by a desire for authoritative assurances, moral quests readily mistake rationalised preferences, those which *seem* natural and logical to an individual or group, for abstract "good".

The intensity of the pawnbroker's dependence on his façade of morality to support the sense of himself he cherishes so strongly (the 'real me' which only he understands), is matched by his intuition that this cherished self-image is highly contestable. His awareness of this challenge to his monologue's ability to enact what he feels to be its rightful authority engenders a particular mode of interaction with ambivalent reality which is typical of monologues' parasitically self-solacing tendencies. The pawnbroker apparently fears loneliness, but genuine communication is necessarily anathema to him.

In the hope of leaving his humiliation behind, the pawnbroker dissociates himself from the social environment in which it took place. He nevertheless feels the isolation from grounds of common approval, to which this dissociation is necessarily condemned, and which it thrives upon.

Through the pawnbroker's narrative Dostoevsky constructs a rhetorical question similar, both in subject and in the ambiguous "direction", to the inverted recommendation of faith which is apparent in *Notes from Underground*.²⁹ In both these works a mode of self-expression and existence among others is presented in accordance with and extension of the prevailing principles of modern individualism. Both the pawnbroker and the Underground Man are, by necessity, devoted to themselves as if to a great cause. In "The Meek Girl" the sacrifice involved in realising one's solipsistic ideal emerges with the psychological profile of Faust's world-forming zeal (his final vocation in Goethe's *Faust II*). The scale is shrunken and the ideal shrinks too (from

²⁸ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl", 260.

²⁹ Reviewing critical reactions to The Underground Man's predicament, in *Dostoevsky's "Notes from Underground"* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), Richard Peace notes that the implicitly self-condemning rendition of his spitefully stagnant cynicism and his irredeemably unhappy conscience, have appeared, to some critics, to affirm both Marxist and Christian notions that "the inadequacies of 'man' ... are merely an argument for surrender to a higher morality, and an unimpeachable authority" (102).

providing a new world for modern humanity, to the overt posture of *après moi le deluge* individualism), but the reprimand of an excluded Care remains.³⁰ In pursuing his project the pawnbroker has been blind to the needs of the meek girl; simply oblivious. The world he is striving to cultivate through her, like Faust's modern and enlightened nation, has no place for Care, and is isolated from happiness. And yet, even when, in true epiphanic style, the scales fall from his eyes and it seems that the pawnbroker understands the nature and extremity of his negligence, he is unable to harmonise his actions with his "insight". The pawnbroker's epiphany exists in the same framework of isolated certainty as did his initial fiction of a magnanimous man wrongly ostracised. Regardless of the source of his epiphany, the pawnbroker's faith in it, or the positive potential it holds, the change does not transcend its bond to the purely human and particular voice that announces it.

Even having apparently repented of the stern pride that enforced the couple's silence - " 'Let's talk ... you know ... why don't you say something?' I suddenly babbled, stupidly - oh, what did I care about being sensible?"³¹ - the pawnbroker's habitual negligence remains: having been in such "a hurry ... to confess to her", he "didn't pay any attention to her fear".³² Apparent in this haste to confess, is the pawnbroker's compulsion to consummate the absolution he experiences in his "epiphanic" self-knowledge by testifying to it. His enthusiasm for his new clearer vision leaves him once again careless of others.

The pawnbroker's prime concern, now as before, is that someone else should know in what manner he makes sense to himself and approve the aptness of his understanding. The urge to testify, to be acknowledged, seeks a different audience, but depends still on habits of delusion and strategic revelations. Without a God who hears, the silent interior self borders on non-existence except as an authority or site of devotion for the public self. Sensing its own irrelevance and aware of the perils of disenchanting exposure, implicit in testifying in one's own terms, the internal monologue seeks to ensure a sympathetic reception by defusing, one way or another, the possible terms which could challenge it.

³⁰ In *Faust II*, the figure commonly translated into English as 'Care', is called '*Sorge*' in the German text. '*Sorge*' translates literally to care, or concern; it is the root of the word for careless and can be taken to imply something like empathy or sympathy for the fate of others. In Faust's case such empathy is lacking, his commitment to reifying his ideal makes him necessarily careless of the damage he wreaks.

³¹ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl", 285.

³² "The Meek Girl", 288.

And the main thing is that at that time I already looked upon her as *my own*, and was in no doubt as to the power I had over her.³³

In cultivating the meek girl, the pawnbroker seeks to implant his self-vindication in the mouth of another, thereby providing it with the external authority capable of absolving him of his public humiliation. The meek girl is to be moulded into a quantity that approves the authority of his monologue and acquits it of the negligence of solipsism. "But in taking her into my household, I thought I was taking a friend; I was so badly in need of a friend. I had a clear perception, however, that the friend would have to be trained, given a finishing, conquered, even".³⁴ Which is to say, the term "friend" is understood by the pawnbroker to mean someone who has conceded to his terms and acknowledged his self-image as valid.³⁵ Conversely, this understanding carries the implication that those who are not in harmony with this image are foes.

What was more, I knew with all the strength of my being that between us, at that very moment, a struggle was taking place, a terrible duel to the death, the duel that ought to have been fought long ago by that coward of yesterday who had been drummed out of the regiment by his friends for cowardice.³⁶

On behalf of his audience the pawnbroker asks: "why didn't I rescue her from her evil doing", why subject her to that "terrible duel"?³⁷ His answer is evident in his initial linking of this "duel" with the girl to the abortive duel that had disgraced him, and in his sense of triumph in the present victory, "she had been vanquished for ever".³⁸ The meek girl is a conduit for the resuscitation of his tarnished "name" and social position; until he has vanquished her in accordance with his initial plan (which acknowledges that the much needed "friend" "would have to be trained, given a finish, conquered, even"³⁹) he is compelled to exacerbate rather than rescue her from any damaging awareness of her predicament. After she is vanquished, however, the meek girl is worth something:

³³ "The Meek Girl", 260.

³⁴ "The Meek Girl", 281.

³⁵ In *Crime and Punishment* Dunya's suitor Luzhin had planned to play Providence to the Raskolnikov family, effectively holding them to ransom for their approval of his self-esteem. The plan fails, the family is repulsed by his strategies, and Luzhin reflects, "Devil take it, why did I turn into such a Jew? There wasn't even any calculation in it! I thought I'd keep them on a short tether for a bit, and get them to see me as their Providence, and now look! ... Pah!" (362). The absence of calculation merely confirms the dependence on material accounting of loss and gain in Luzhin's social relationships.

³⁶ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl", 277.

³⁷ "The Meek Girl", 277.

³⁸ "The Meek Girl", 277.

³⁹ "The Meek Girl", 281.

Having withstood the revolver, I had avenged the whole of my gloomy past. And although no one knew about it, *she* did, and to me that was everything, because she herself was everything to me, all the hope for my future that lived in my dreams! She was the only person I was going to make ready for myself. I had no need of anyone else - and now she had learnt everything - she had learnt, at least, that she had been unjust in hurrying to join the ranks of my enemies. This thought had delighted me. In her eyes I could no longer be a villain[.]⁴⁰

Typically, the actual thoughts of the meek girl are unimportant, and the “villain” she could no longer take him for is based solely on his own tormented sense of the “villain” which his refusal to fight a duel had made him out to be. The meek girl had “learnt everything”, everything that mattered at least for her future as a mirror of the pawnbroker’s egotistical pride.

As the meek girl’s natural character nurtures prejudices hostile to his “dream”, the pawnbroker’s “system” instinctively seeks to mute its expression. “That was the bad thing - that I’m a dreamer: I had enough material, and what I thought about her was that *she could wait*”.⁴¹ Through the report of this particular dreamer Dostoevsky implies a general incapacity of the type to accustom themselves to engagement with others in any terms but their own. Intending to reify his dreams through the token external authority of the meek girl the pawnbroker is necessarily required to graft, nurture and quash elements of her personality. The pawnbroker’s synthesising efforts to alter the meek girl’s sensibilities proceed with a complementary disregard for the meek girl as a being with her own rights, desires and terms of understanding. This disregard facilitates the oblivious acts of hostility which the monologue demands.

In *Dostoyevsky and the Novel*, Michael Holquist observes that the pawnbroker’s monologue is attended and advanced by a self-serving objectification of others: “they *are*, simply that they may become parts of the whole he is driven to constitute”.⁴² The self-aggrandisement which accompanies the reduction of other individuals to tools in a master-plan, plot or scheme brings into clear relief the thwarted hubris in which monologue is rooted. As an extension of the effects of monologic self-assertion on an individual’s relation with others, the objectification perpetrated by the pawnbroker is extreme; the pattern, though, is a common one throughout the literature of bourgeois modernity. The concentrated focus of Dostoevsky’s depiction of this pattern, along

⁴⁰ “The Meek Girl”, 281.

⁴¹ “The Meek Girl”, 281.

⁴² Michael Holquist, *Dostoyevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 151.

with his anxiety for the implications of its individualist roots, magnifies its features into the exaggerated clarity of the grotesque.

Holquist's assertion seems to place too much emphasis on the pawnbroker's prescient control of the role of other people in his monologue. It is a minor difference but it seems fairer to say that *because* other people exist, he is driven to subordinate them through his monologue, that is, in "the whole he is driven to constitute". Holquist's emphasis on the existence of others "simply that they may become parts" of this whole certainly reflects their significance within the pawnbroker's monologue but misrepresents how they come to be implicated in it. The otherwise independent meek girl, representing the external world, is conscripted to serve the pawnbroker's manipulative attempts to construct, and then experience, an external manifestation of the solipsistic narrative which sustains his ideal self-conception. This act of conscription is necessitated by the pawnbroker's compulsion to justify his persisting self-esteem (troublingly at odds with the reality the reader can recognise beneath his narrative) as reflecting something more than merely a cloistered and subjective self-opinion. A recalcitrant reality, pregnant with unsatisfactory and galling reflections of his character and actions, demands this reaction. The pawnbroker's distorting and parasitic relationship to external truth gradually communicates the persistence and veracity of the latent truth he seeks to drown out. But it is in the effect on his capacity for intimacy and self-awareness which results from the problematic conjunction of the two, the truth he seeks to reify and that which he seeks to annul, that the ominous general implications of his isolation are apparent.⁴³

The pawnbroker's ultimate inability to listen to more than his own requirements, returns the insult of a world that will not approve his idealised self-conception. The meek girl's death deprives the pawnbroker of the symbol of rebirth and communal

⁴³ In many of his novels, but particularly in *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens exposes a parasitic tendency in individuals' fixations with and assertions of their theoretical equality and abstract "rights", with a comic fervour in keeping with his greater optimism in the prospect of humanity's capacity for ennobling selflessness.

You are a man of family. Don't deceive yourself for a moment that I am a man of family. I am a bit of dirty riff-raff, and a genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail.'

... 'So now,' said Bounderby, 'we may shake hands on equal terms. I say, equal terms, because although I know what I am, and the exact depth of the gutter I have lifted myself out of, better than any man does, I am proud as you are. I am just as proud as you are. Having now asserted my independence in a proper manner, I may come to how do you find yourself, and I hope you're pretty well.'

Hard Times (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), 160.

Dostoevsky's pawnbroker destroys the meek girl (as Bounderby had almost destroyed Louisa) in the process of asserting the independence in which he feels comfortable enough to come to "how do you find yourself".

acceptance into which he had moulded her. Without this symbol he conceives of himself as disinherited and condemned to stifled silence. When the pawnbroker asks, "Why has a dismal inertia destroyed what was dearest to me?", he does not mourn the girl, *per se*, but the mirror he had finally managed to make of her.⁴⁴ The pawnbroker goes so far as to wonder whether he might simply keep the girl's corpse, her death seems only an obstacle to the practicalities of his investment of her presence with his own required meanings. To accept her extinction, though, is to surrender the vessel through which he had claimed his redemption, and to lose his carefully wrought consolation (the dream hopes realised) for his necessary dissociation from the privileged sphere of his ideal self-conception.

Ultimately the victims of the pawnbroker's parasitic self-interest are the girl and himself. The state which compelled the pawnbroker to take a friend is also the fate to which his method of forging a friendship condemns him: "now it's back to empty rooms again, and once again I'm on my own. There's the pendulum ticking away, it's not interested, it's not sorry about anything. Now there's no-one - that's the terrible thing!".⁴⁵

" 'Is there anyone alive upon the plain?' shouts the Russian epic hero. I too am shouting, but I am no epic hero, and no one replies".⁴⁶ A philosophical, religious, or political discourse applies to an external authority; it addresses itself to an authority (the ideological dimensions of such discourses inevitably reflect this sense of sanction) in relation to which human interruptions or considerations have limited jurisdiction. When these "disciplines" lose their extra-human authority (whether it had related to divinity, or something akin to a Platonic Ideal) and are recognised as contingent expressions or constructions of human 'voices',⁴⁷ then the epic hero's expectation of *deus ex machina* type resolution or affirmation becomes manifestly futile. "Only people are alive, and around them is silence".⁴⁸

The pawnbroker's dramatic assertion that we are alone on the plain alludes to an ideological scene in which sceptical particularisation must be acknowledged and accepted as the real foundation of every indulgence in enthusiastic expression. Clough's "brood of the wind", who "nest on the wave" and "bed on the crested

⁴⁴ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl", 294.

⁴⁵ "The Meek Girl", 293.

⁴⁶ "The Meek Girl", 295.

⁴⁷ As Bakhtin observes in "Epic and Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3-40).

⁴⁸ Dostoevsky, "The Meek Girl", 295.

billow”,⁴⁹ offers an evocative analogy for a similarly abandoned (or liberated) existence from which only human voices sound. Clough’s work implies furthermore what a suspect anomaly absolute certainty must be when no external authority exists to grant it.

Care

While events, changes, and simple variety of experience continually stimulate new perspectives and suggest new means of organising the self and its relation to other selves, in a state of moral uncertainty, residual frameworks of belief, moral conduct and consolation fade but never go out: there is no justification absolute enough to extinguish them. In the emotivist world, moral orders all stem from isolated justifications; they can convince and impress but the allegiance to one such moral order does not offer the stability of a rational refutation of others.

In *Faust – Part One*, directing Margareta’s attention to the “eternal mystery” all around, and to the bliss it inspires, Faust declares: “Of such a feeling, call it what you like! / Call it joy, or your heart, or love or God! / I have no name for it. The feeling’s all there is: / The name’s mere noise and smoke”.⁵⁰ Margareta concedes that Faust makes sense and that his explanation sounds something like the priest’s, it is “just in the wording there’s a difference”.⁵¹ Faust assures her, “It is what all men say, / All human hearts under the blessed day / Speak the same message, each / In its own speech: / May I not speak in mine?”.⁵² Faust essentially dismisses the particular significances of these subjective individual expressions by asserting that they all express the same disposition, call it divine faith, call it awe, call it moral independence. In his desire to reassure Margareta that his non-conformity is not morally suspect he waves away the need for any deeper understanding among relative positions and consents to the loss of common terms capable of serving as a vehicle of communal interaction and compromised agreement.

It is typically ‘care’, in some form, which is the obstacle idealists encounter in trying to sustain the applicability of their vision to the world. In Goethe’s *Faust II*, Faust’s visitation by a ghostly figure called Care reifies the implication that his remoulding of

⁴⁹ Clough, *Amours de Voyage*, III.iv.93-94.

⁵⁰ Goethe, *Faust – Part One*, ln. 3453-56.

⁵¹ *Faust – Part One*, ln. 3460.

⁵² *Faust – Part One*, ln. 3461-65.

the world in the image of his ideological vision had been an act of capricious hostility. While Faust's fortress is proof against the material claims of Want, Debt and Need, their sister Care is able to infiltrate and to try him. Faust rejects her right to do so: "though the creeping power of Care be great, / This power I will never recognize!".⁵³ Care appears to represent the power of something similar to Hamlet's coward-making conscience, it imposes inhibitions which distract the individual from their desires, spontaneous resolves and convictions with concerns for the anxieties and uncertainties and wider complexities these decisive "inspirations" often deny or neglect. Care's physical blinding of Faust reifies unequivocally the blindness which is implicit in the way Faust effaces the credibility of human needs which challenge his own. The denial of ambivalent and multifaceted reality which is latent in the active fulfilment of ideological protests, firstly reflects a dominance of self-interest (evident in the precedence given to fulfilling one's personal duty to one's ideal) over concern for others. Thereafter, continued fidelity to such active fulfilments *necessitates* the oppression of any tendency to entertain the kind of negative capability which would expose the capriciousness of the denial in which they are founded. In spite of being necessitated by involvement with others, the faustian compromise corrodes the basis of interpersonal intimacy and isolates the individual, who ends up imprisoned within their dependence on the consolations the compromise provides.

The Faustian compromise, with its consequent subordination of a capacity to care for others to individuals' infatuated convictions, affects both large scale notions (supernaturally reified in Faust's development of a new world) and the simplest of personal relationships. What Dostoevsky, in "The Meek Girl", translates into a particular image of a distorted marriage, is the extreme of a disrupting infatuation with individual quests (for knowledge, wealth, place, in short: fulfilment in a particular individually approved "virtue") that is a major presence particularly in nineteenth century realism, and more generally in secular culture.⁵⁴ In *The Meek Girl*

⁵³ *Faust - Part One*, ln. 11493-94.

⁵⁴ Seen as the travesty of a marriage (in which there are resonances of the ultimately stale and self-interested ideological partnership of Chernyshevsky's Lopukhov and Vera Pavlovna in *What Is to Be Done?*), Dostoevsky's story addresses the influence of individualistic pride and strategising on what, ideally, is the most collaborative and selfless of interpersonal relationships. Idealistic motives similar to those of Chernyshevsky's Lopukhov - who liberates Vera Pavlovna, who is unhappily oppressed by traditions of female subservience and arranged marriage, by marrying her on a basis of rational equality and comradeship - play a token role in the pawnbroker's early account of his interest in the meek girl's domestic circumstances. "Under the pitiless burden of her daily toil" the meek girl has maintained her innocence and dignity, in keeping with "a striving for the lofty and the noble on her part!" ("The Meek Girl", 260). The "filthy details", which the pawnbroker admits he had learned later, are gathered anachronistically together to gild his proposal with a philanthropic awareness: "After all, why do you think I wanted to marry her" (260); to rescue her of course.

Dostoevsky's pessimism for a future community of individuals whose highest and strongest intuition is the realisation of their cherished self-image insinuates itself into the bonds of marriage (the epicentre of the family unit) and inter-personal relationships. The pawnbroker is branded with the satanic pride of individualism, a modern malaise which, in Dostoevsky's work, links criminals, fools, the immature and the educated (with varying results). Inspired, and to some extent induced, by the apparent dissolution of traditional grounds of moral conduct, and by the loosening of social restrictions, which had previously determined, respectively, the theoretical and practical acceptability of commitment to individualistic ambition, self-righteously individualistic characters proliferate throughout the fiction of the epoch. Such figures, littered throughout the works of Pushkin, Turgenev and Dostoevsky, are repeatedly condemned by Dickens and anatomised and accepted by Stendhal and Balzac, Henry James and Herman Melville. Balzac's Philippe Bridau (in *The Black Sheep* (1840-42)); Dickens' Josiah Bounderby, and even Pip before he renounces his expectations; Hermann in Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*, and Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* along with Stepan Verkhovensky's representative culpability for a brood of spiritually fatherless demons, the progeny of the negligent self indulgence of his generations' romantic individualism; all exemplify a tendency towards conceptually isolated monomania, that necessarily accompanies the certainties and entitlements defended within the implications of individualism.

In contrast, merely circumstantial and particular acts of selflessness are allowed to reflect a truly compelling, even enchanting, call to duty. In *Demons*, a fine example of this is precipitated by the birth of Marya Shatov's baby: the baby becomes the epicentre of a mood of renewal which is made more fragile, precious and compelling by the subsequent murder of the child's would-be surrogate father. Shatov's humble affirmation of the essential propriety of familial and parental responsibility (it is not *his* baby, but a baby nonetheless, in need of a father) suggests a potent triumph over pride and personality. Through the bonds which Shatov responds to so wholeheartedly, and with so many apparent reasons not to, in contrast to the bonds Pyotr Stepanovich aims to forge through murder, Dostoevsky achieves an amplification of the relative moral values he seeks to convey in each. Shatov's rebirth from ideological 'possession' originates in his response to a very particular situation with profound and admirable humility and selflessness. This potential for rebirth is catalysed by the kind of local and finite imperatives which, for example. Myshkin's disastrous commitment, in *The Idiot*,

to promote and serve the abstract idea of selflessness as a secular absolute seems unable to acknowledge or accept.

The lack of care for others which attends individualists' absorption in their internal image of the world leaves an ultimately impoverished self-reliance as the necessary mode of human interaction. Family responsibilities and nurturing relationships of all varieties cave in to individuals' perceptions of their rights and responsibilities to their solipsistic worldview.

In the economic principles of universal competition, in which the invisible hand of the market stands in as the moral mandate of proper conduct, Clough saw a similar encouragement of the most primitive of instincts and a threat to the potentially civilising intimacy of unselfish relationships.

Each for himself is still the rule,
We learn it when we go to school,
The devil take the hindmost, O.

...

Husband for husband wife for wife
Are careful that in married life
The devil take the hindmost, O.⁵⁵

The pawnbroker's protest that he was in no position to rescue the meek girl holds for all these characters. Monologue becomes the sign of a strategic relationship with others, it thrives on and perpetuates hierarchy and inequality. Just as Golyadkin is unwittingly condemning himself to the experience of exclusion, and the Underground Man feels he doesn't get a chance to, and therefore "can't be ... good!", the emotional immaturity of the emblematic individualists previously mentioned, is a circumstance with which they are obscurely but willingly complicit.⁵⁶ They have been seduced into a self-perpetuating compromise, either in their evasive self-denial or passive escapism, or in the perverse consolation of spiteful self-loathing. To acknowledge that, at extremes, these characters are unable to observe the interests of others does nothing to exonerate this inability.⁵⁷ It is clear, after all, that there *are* things they could do, sacrifices they

⁵⁵ Clough, "*In Stratis Viarum – I*", *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 270, ln.1-12.

⁵⁶ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 123.

⁵⁷ The individualist's self-reliant and sometimes perversely independent mind-set moulds a combatively strategic means of relating to others which incidentally, but no less starkly, opposes family harmony. Phillippe Bridau (in Balzac's *The Black Sheep*), cannot acknowledge such a woman as his mother is (unrefined and middle-class) to be his mother and continue to be what he aspires to be. Nurturing his ambitious self-image, he closes himself off from the possibility of compromising associations. Phillippe grew up amid the "speculative individualism" of America, he has been reared by a sort of mercantile self-

could make, and truths they could acknowledge; their guilt lies in the self-approved system which renders these avenues invisible, unthinkable or unattainable.

Guarded Conviction and the Virtues of Disruption

Subsequent to the disruption of commonly accepted sources of external authority (such as God), individuals who require the monologic assurances of an absolute authority are forced to generate their own. Consequently, material interests and emotional preferences become clothed in abstract justifications to deflect the implicit contestability of any subjective desire or opinion. Monologue becomes prolific as a mutual disorientation allows and encourages individuals to persuade themselves and others that their subjective ideals and moral codes reflect authoritative general truths. Hence individualistic monologues become the absolute idealist's most satisfying mode of expression. The affirmation of self-worth becomes attached to this mirage of authority. This emotional affirmation is monologue's most enduring claim on the individual, the emotional reassurance of making sense in accordance with their particular perception of the nature and virtue of rational affirmation. For idealists' typically anxious feelings of displacement or deprivation, this seductive reassurance as to the credibility of their self-perception provides the potential to at least feel secure within their own being. In "The Meek Girl", the pawnbroker's isolation within his own understanding of his rightful self-image, reflects the consequence of maintaining such a safe haven. Discrediting and excluding a displeasing reality offers the solipsist security, but perpetuates the necessity of a perennially tenuous isolation, maintaining a truth they can never attempt to verify without jeopardising their relationship to it.

Unlike soliloquy, where a character's "peers" are not present, monologue is an indirect appeal to an implicit group which exists in the same state of decentred authority, relying on finite and subjective inclinations and intuitions, rather than the directives of a shared external authority (Bakhtin's "novelistic" frame, for instance, in which author, characters and reader all stand on level ground). This is the source of the revealing friction between conviction, uncertainty, assertiveness and supplication in which the resistance to the credibility of alternative perspectives is evident. In a sense

commodification in which he is both his product and promoter. The family proposes bonds that do not comply with the demands of this code of individualism, hence the tension of the modern speculating/ambitious child and the aggression towards family bonds. It is an aggression which seems

the monologue strives to experience the apparently passive complicity of a soliloquist's audience. In such a condition, comfortable responses to the actual contentions and interruptions that occur are implicitly contained already in the profile of the individual's authoritative version of the world. Dreamers and idealists experience rational objections as trials of faith, challenges provide binding opportunities for the affirmation of the clarity of their unique vision. They become necessarily more certain and more isolated in the beliefs and habits supported by their monologue.

The addictive satisfaction experienced by dreamers is the absolute certainty of the individual's personal significance which, in isolation, the dream enacts for them. As the dreamer in Dostoevsky's "White Nights" observes, dreams furnish a world in which "the most important figure is, of course, our dreamer himself, in prized and precious person".⁵⁸ Monologue attempts to place this dream-like satisfaction into the mouth of the world, or the mouth of another.⁵⁹

Comparing the characterisations attained through dramatic monologue to those attainable in the novel, Dorothy Mermin, in *The Audience in the Poem*, suggests that "the incidents that monologues enact are not formative or educative: they can reveal the speaker's character but they do not alter it".⁶⁰ This is in fact the condition to which those who cocoon themselves in monologue essentially aspire; monologue aims assertively to impose stability by excluding or sabotaging real opposition. But essential aspirations aside, the actual fact of monologic utterances and the behaviour they defend involves a tension and anxiety which is susceptible to alteration. This confused intermingling of assertiveness and uncertainty is the natural state of attempts to sustain individual authority after the loss of external Absolutes. In its necessarily selective relationship with concrete fact monologic individualism is pregnant with its own repudiation.

In conveying the tendency of monologic order's tendency to isolate itself from the outside world, interruptions, literal and figurative, are crucial. As reflections of the author's awareness of the undesirable nature of their characters' predicament,

based, not in the obsolescence of these bonds, but rather in their persisting reality, and for their formidable challenge as an "opponent" to individualistic programs of self promotion.

⁵⁸ Dostoevsky, "White Nights", 89.

⁵⁹ Placing one's subjectively approved and self-assuring worldview into the mouth of another stands as an example of the kind of external approval absolutists often require in spite of their apparent "conviction". The most common type of monologic tyranny exists in the manner of the relationships such individuals cultivate with others. I shall discuss this tyranny further in relation to Dostoevsky's depictions of the insidious separateness of individualism, particularly in the short story "The Meek Girl".

⁶⁰ Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 11.

interruptions are rarely unappealing. In “White Nights”, Nastenka’s interruption of the dreamer’s life-story, and of his habitual dreaming, allows him to glimpse his existence in relation to his dreams rather than from within their distortions. The shock experienced in the intrusion of external disruptions reflects infatuation’s typical hostility to concession or compromise.

When cultivators of a monologue come to recognise that it hangs together by way of their position at its core, their monologue’s allegedly objective credibility collapses and their justification for disregarding other voices fails. Where this justification is not refurbished, this failure can result in the revelatory, sometimes epiphanic, awareness of having emerged from a selective reality.

The expert manipulator of the seductive assurance of monologic certainty comes to require acuity, though not self-knowledge, and an analytical ruthlessness which singles out the tones and terms of others’ vanity. Becky Sharp, Thackeray’s speculator in the snobbery of others, offers one example of such expertise: Becky’s successes last for as long as she can make herself a significant and affirming clause in the plausibility of others’ self-images. The disenfranchised confidence of an increasingly sceptical and individualistic population, along with their desire to believe in something, even if just their own judgement, is preyed upon in a similar fashion by Melville’s confidence trickster, in *The Confidence Man*. Melville’s novel suggests that without the grounding of common external standards of conviction or faith, individuals are unavoidably subject to influences which merely play upon their vanity or desire for certainty.

As a means of “listening” to works of literature, a sceptical readiness to “hear” the anomalies that betray hidden motives and attempts to fabricate conviction can also be invited or stimulated by the author, as it is by Clough and by Dostoevsky. This invitation is a fundamental expression of the aesthetic intuitions of Clough’s poetry. It determines the character not only of his major discursive works but interlaces the voices of his shorter poems in an assertion of the multiple and flexible convictions that can be generated in response to what is objectively the same stimulus. The particular circumstance and tone – and therein the use to which any expression is implicitly linked – emerge as a crucial directive in linking utterance to utterer (maintaining the dignity of the individual utterer without the recourse to absolute meaning residing in the utterance itself).

An existence dependent on the seemingly absolute assurances of monologic certainty cannot effectively hide its secret motivations. The monologue’s tones of false authority

surrender up the same meaning to the sceptical ear as utterances willing to concede any claim to authority in recognition of the ambiguity of individual conviction. Each attests to a limitation of human ideology, the latter directly, and the former through recognisable evasions of fact which its failed attempts to flaunt these limits necessitate.

The works that best convey the equipoise of multiple “truths” are not trying to assert this fragmentation but to experience, evoke or invoke horizons. In Dostoevsky’s case it is the horizon imposed by a unilateral human incapacity to effect the authority embodied in the idea of God. For Clough’s characters, the horizon marks the same limit (and therefore the *human* sphere of meaning has the same dimensions for both authors) but through their explorations into meanings beyond this horizon, Clough depicts the consequences of their inability to find anything they haven’t themselves participated in placing there (anything, that is, external to human culture). In alluding to this inability, Clough’s poems convey the curiously ephemeral nature of the ideas of order which the poems’ protagonists esteem with such anxiety and anguish; their idea of the one thing necessary melts away leaving not chaos, abandonment or deprivation, just the challenge and provocation of natural uncertainty. Dostoevsky’s monologic characters enact their refusal of a similar uncertainty by experiencing the world in accordance with their intrusive solipsisms.

In the “dreamer’s” reminiscences that make up Dostoevsky’s early tale “White Nights”, a dependence on imaginary fulfilments is sympathetically anatomised and simultaneously denounced. In language that seeks initially to evade his own involvement, the dreamer speaks of the “magical, animated tableau” his dreams would superimpose on an undesirable reality. He speaks from experience of course, and in acknowledging this by consenting to frame his observations around “I”, the dreamer begins to graduate from the evasions made available by the objective and generic style. This is the first sign of the progress, or recovery, recognised later and celebrated by Nastenka. From the stagnation of abstract thought and silence, the dreamer’s conversation with Nastenka unlocks the proportion which solipsism lacks, and engenders a momentum of engagement.

I was waiting for Nastenka, who was listening to me with her intelligent eyes wide open, to break into her childish, irrepressibly mirthful, laughter, and was already kicking myself for having gone too far, for having blurted out everything that had long been seething within my heart, and about which I was able to talk as if I were reading from a written text, because I had long ago prepared my own verdict on

myself, and could not now keep myself from reading it out, from making my confession, without any expectation that I would be understood[.]⁶¹

The dreamer's impulse to speak is coupled with the awareness of an inadequacy in what will be said. The awareness is not of the inadequacy of words as tools of representation but, rather, of their incapacity to dominate ambivalent reality merely through the subjective conviction that underlies their straightforward formulation (except in relation to the remodelled nature of reality, within the dreamer's "dream"). The interpretations cannot be controlled. The pawnbroker's interference with the meek girl's terms, and the characteristic clauses on clauses that dominate the confessions of underground dreamers, suggest desperate attempts to speak (offer) and simultaneously impose their own frame or terms of interpretation.⁶² This is not confined to the underground confession; it is evident to greater or lesser extent in any confession that has as its primary intention the approval of the confessor's version of events. This desire for the reification of an individual's sense of himself or herself, the striving to be understood in one's own terms, carries as a complement the intention of silencing, or otherwise subordinating, the terms of others, an intention which limits its own possibilities for understanding.

The formulation of the "written text" (to which the narrator refers in the passage above), with its precision and rehearsed control, testifies to the dreamer's determination, exacerbated by his insecurity, to be understood in his own terms. "The life of which I speak is a blend of the purely fantastic and the fervently ideal with (alas, Nastenka) the dingily prosaic and ordinary, not to say the unbelievably vulgar".⁶³ While the dreamer's interior ideal self is cherished as "the real me", this tender favour and protection reflect an intuition of its tenuous potency in its own right. In expressing his self-knowledge he hopes to make it something independent of himself but also to identify himself with it. The dreamer gets his first hint that his bookish "written text" is an inappropriate means of communication from Nastenka's immediate interjection: "Ugh! Good Lord, what a preamble! I'm not sure I want to hear this!".⁶⁴

Though not actually written down, the dreamer's "story" in "White Nights" exists as a self controlling text. Such resorts to a semblance of objectivity or disinterest

⁶¹ Dostoevsky, "White Nights", 91.

⁶² The pre-emptive explanations which seek to disrupt alternative interpretations feature similarly in some of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. In such instances they also serve a dual purpose: the character's exertions strive to quash dialogue while the disturbance created by these exertions alerts the reader to the implied shape of a phantom adversary.

⁶³ Dostoevsky, "White Nights", 84.

⁶⁴ "White Nights", 84.

(apparent also, for example, in Raskolnikov's justifications of his moral rebellion and in the pawnbroker's justifications of his exploitation of the meek girl) suggest individuals' intuitive attempts to efface any traces of special pleading or self-interested casuistry and to disguise from themselves and from others the reliance of their convictions on tenuous extrapolations of idiosyncratic responses to reality. The special pleading with which solipsistic individuals tend to protect the authority of their worldview from the interruptions latent in ambivalent fact is inevitably transformed, in their own understanding, into an act of recognition and affirmation of the compelling credibility of their ideal, through which they correct and, in effect, chastise a recalcitrant and inferior reality. In so doing, these individuals ensure that their self-image always remains innocent: in presenting their emotivist moral orientations as acts of recognition and submission to higher authorities, they allow themselves to believe that the principles these authorities sanction, the consequences they produce, as well as the authority's potential failure, relate solely to the moral status of the abstraction they ostensibly serve. They exempt themselves, that is, from any obligation to accept fundamental accountability for their idealistic activities or the unsuspected consequences thereof. If the consequences of their devotions are challenged, therefore, their own accountability remains limited to the credulous sincerity with which they mistakenly approved a false idol. In such circumstances, the status of follower or devotee becomes a convenient alibi, allowing previously committed individuals to reproach themselves with ignorance, gullibility, hope, but to avoid accountability for any misdeeds which they might have idealistically committed.

Similarly, in *Dipsychus*, the proposed subordination of self-interest to an idea of a more noble code of conduct, abstracted from contingent and personal compromise, provides fundamental support for Dipsychus' posture of idealistic detachment from a debased world. In *Amours*, Claude's attempts to practice a kind of dutiful, and therefore dignifying, objectivity also mark his reflections, whether on the history of Religion, Mazzini's Roman Republic or his attachment to Mary Trevellyn, with a sober equanimity similar in intention (though not intensity) to Stavrogin's attempt, through what Bakhtin deems the deliberately "wooden" second-guessing of his confession, to control a moral background to his confession which is fraught with alternative and accusatory implications.⁶⁵ In placing himself and his reflections in the crucible of self scrutiny, Claude subjects his existence to the mediation of whichever tropes or

⁶⁵ The deliberately self-effacing devices within Stavrogin's confession are discussed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, particularly pages 244-45.

conventions, out of those that furnish him with possibilities of clear expression, remain entirely apt reflections of his intellectual and emotional state. Nevertheless, these apt conventions (typically tropes of confusion or disorientation, *ie.* spiritual orphanhood, the battle by night) still generate feelings of dissatisfaction and his own inadequacy, which reflect a continuing antagonism between Claude's varyingly sober and playful consent to compromise for the sake of participating and communicating with others, and his persisting disdain for the factitious commitments to which, in his mind, this compromise necessarily consigns him. Claude's epistolary reports and Stavrogin's confession seek control over problematic disruptions to their desired self image. Claude's sceptical scrutiny and exacting explications reflect the rigour of his asymptotic approach to certainty; evincing an underlying doubt of the self's jurisdiction to judge anything, including itself.

Writing on Clough's "agnostic imagination" in *The Lucid Veil*,⁶⁶ W. David Shaw refers to heightened consciousness and uncertainty as enemies of closure (having 'become', as opposed to becoming). This perpetuation of uncertainty is, however, the consequence of the most rigorous and uncompromising compulsion to establish grounds for adamant conviction. The ripples of causation, extending *ad infinitum*, proliferate through a desperate yet highly disciplined grasping after foundations; everything is searched through, every angle, every clause. The natural consequence of this is the discovery of more contradictions and further uncertainty (for every vacuum there is a plenum).⁶⁷ To speak of or to perceive uncertainty primarily in negative terms (as a

⁶⁶ W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), particularly the chapter: "Clough's Agnostic Imagination: The Uses of Uncertainty" (136-41).

⁶⁷ Attention to these perpetual ripples creates a thought pattern always seeking out causes of causes, projecting sequences and following them backwards. This habit extends also to wranglings with the future: stimulated by the merest circumstance, self-narrating individuals can live out a possible life-time in their minds. Though this ersatz reality carries the semblance of actual experience, and though these individuals often treat these experiences as real (more real in fact than their reality), it merely sets up further solipsistic self-dependence in place of objective fact.

By "self-narrating" I do not mean, for example, the Underground Man's sessions of imaginary wish-fulfilment, or the tendency of these fulfilments to dissipate his inclination to pursue his aspirations in reality. I mean, rather, the tendency to mentally extrapolate from an inclination, a choice, a chance event or possibility for action, a "lateral" procession of consequences, and, treating this procession as inevitable and *real* in spite of it being merely imaginary, refusing to actually engage in the first step. It is a tendency which is often intertwined with a fastidious dictating to circumstance and the circumscription of its possible consequences within the bounds of purportedly transparent inevitabilities. This tendency, typically timorous, is well exemplified by Dipsychus' projection, in *Dipsychus and The Spirit*, of the fate of any young woman who might join him (or any other man) in sexual experimentation: "The swallowed dram entails the drunkard's curse / . . . and the coy girl / Turns to the flagrant woman of the street / Ogling for hirers, horrible to see" (1.3.93-96). Dipsychus cannot accept any complicity with such a fate, merely for his "poor pleasure's sake" (1.3.158), and therefore must abstain. This particular example has an element of a personally ritualised (or taught) invocation of precautionary consequences – it does not just forestall consequences it is *used* to forestall consequences – but this particular ritual further exemplifies the ease with which any uncertain appetite or inclination can be dissipated or rendered undesirable by such anxious imaginary extrapolations. In *Amours de Voyage*, Claude, pondering the

function, that is, of the closure it forestalls) is perhaps appropriate to the essential intentions of the rigorously self-qualifying hunt for first principles, but the authority of these intentions depends on a problematic and essentially capricious insistence on the actual attainability of their goal (absolute certainty, or convincing first principles). The awkwardly over-qualified statements which are often employed by characters who need to feel or show themselves to be more certain than they really are reflect conflicted attempts to prop up or 'fix' utterances which are in fact sound reflections of the inability of their moral environment to support the kind of absolute certainty, whether in self-knowledge or of external first principles, which they desire.⁶⁸ Their respective reliance

notion that "*Action will furnish belief*", suggests that, if this is true, then "what one wants", is "to predetermine the action" so that the belief will not be dictated by chance, but will reaffirm some pre-approved truth (V.ii.20-23). This is a problematically circular desire, and it highlights a reluctance to accept ambiguous or partial inspirations or desires as valid grounds for action. This reluctance bears a good deal of responsibility for the distempered palate which, predominantly, leads Claude habitually (and not always honestly) to find notions of worldly interaction unappealing, uninspiring and easily disparaged.

⁶⁸ As Tikhon observes, in *Demons*, Stavrogin's façade of cold-blooded indifference in his confession - which Bakhtin identifies as a "woodenness", through which Stavrogin "arranges every sentence so that his personal tone does not slip through" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 245) - is intended to provoke those who will read it to more adamant condemnations. To such predictable condemnation Stavrogin would be able to respond with contemptuous superiority, thus evading the shame and guilt which an audience's pity or forgiveness might force him to admit and respond to. Just before offering his unsolicited confession, Stavrogin protests, "Listen I don't like spies and psychologists, at least those who try to pry into my soul. I don't invite anyone into my soul, I don't need anyone, I'm able to manage by myself" (*Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994), 689), while after, he insists again that "I am in no way inviting you to quickly start objecting to me and entreating me" (706). The irascibility of Stavrogin's preliminaries and closing remarks to Tikhon betray feelings of anxiety, challenge, despair and spite which he hopes to juggle, balance and negate to a point of satisfactory certainty (one way or another, moral surrender or triumph, though he would prefer not to admit that his uncomely crime was the act of a hollow parasite, rather than the instinctive amoral self-expression of an intrinsic outsider).

Claude's qualifying clauses seek to gradually attune outright statements to the partiality which he is so conscious of, and committed to admitting, and to render as nicely as possible his experience of a world that seems intrinsically resilient to attempts to establish any grounds for absolute certitude of belief or purpose. Can he be sure of the Republican revolution? Can he be sure of his feelings? Can he be sure of his perceptions, or of the real circumstances they seem to constitute?

So I have seen a man killed! An experience that, among
others!
Yes, I suppose I have; although I can hardly be certain,
And in a court of justice could never declare I had seen it.
But a man was killed, I am told, in a place where I saw
Something; a man was killed, I am told, and I saw
something.

(*Amours*, II.vii.162-66).

This example is drawn from the instance in which Claude is perhaps most involved in something externally active: a catholic priest, seeking to escape the city, has been murdered, perhaps, by an angry mob; it is the closest Claude gets to adventure, or the external provocation of the picaresque. This actual happening is soon cocooned, though, in sceptical, inward-looking interrogations of his reaction to the disturbance, in an attempt to winnow fact from any merely habitual or conventional reactions and explanations. In his recount, his precision and fidelity to his uncertain impressions is striking. Throughout the poem similar patterns of qualifying clauses are used to a more definite effect to allude to the body of qualifying detail and contradictory complexities, which lies beneath any of his partial and

on qualifying clauses shows them struggling to formulate their own authority as an abstract utterance which will remain viable beyond their particular emotive involvement with it. In their different ways, they each seek to trial their particular perceptions and judgements as instances of conviction which might serve as the archetype of general truths. These attempts to formulate a controlled persuasive objectivity, whether motivated by an earnest or self-serving desire to generalise personal beliefs, indirectly reflect the effect of a decentred field of moral agreement on individuals' relationships with moral abstractions.

Artistic representations of characters' monologic intentions and exertions typically present the incapacity of any subjective generalised ideal adequately to render or contain the ambiguity and uncertainty of ambivalent reality. The disruptions and dissatisfaction which this incapacity typically invites expose the folly of placing a subjective image of authority as the central impulse of one's understanding and expectations of existence.

equivocal convictions, statements, doubts and feelings. Throughout the poem, these clauses establish a rigorous honesty that acknowledges the irreducible contingency and ambiguities so thoroughly that even in admissions of helpless confusion, Claude's letters maintain a resilient air of expressive competence and clarity.

CHAPTER 4 - Uncertain Convictions

I.

Anchored in Abstraction

In "Spiritual Authority in the Nineteenth Century", Northrop Frye suggests: "In a sense the search for spiritual authority is really the search for a "governor" in the mechanical sense, something that distributes the rhythm of a mechanism without being involved in the mechanism itself".¹ Frye observes that, "spiritual authority begins in the recognition of truth" which "has about it some quality of the objective".²

Earlier in the essay, Frye notes Mill's observation that "the non-existence of an acknowledged first principle has made ethics not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments".³ In such a state, ethical statements become a self-reflecting exercise, like political or partisan interpretations of history they can betray intentions beneath their explicitly objective judgements. And the quest for truth becomes a means of sustaining the desirable but remote notion of their possibility. The inward turn which this quest takes suggests, then, a covert quixoticism in which individuals seek external absolutes through a self-seducing internalised relationship with abstractions.⁴

Claude (initially) and Dipsychus hold the idea of an innermost I as an anchor, an authentic thing, which they drop down to fix themselves after the dissolution of religious certainties leaves a world of finite, man-made, and therefore contestable, morality and conviction. The psychological necessity of this anchor is the source of their initial conviction in its reality (though what it eventually comes to mean in reality often forces them to ponder its worth and accuracy). The dilemma between Dipsychus'

¹ Northrop Frye, "Spiritual Authority in the Nineteenth Century", *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age*, eds. Millar MacLure & F.W. Watt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964); 304-319, 318.

² Frye, "Spiritual Authority in the Nineteenth Century", 317.

³ Frye, "Spiritual Authority in the Nineteenth Century", 314.

⁴ The nature and significance of such shifts are discussed in far greater detail by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self*. Throughout Part IV, "The Voice of Nature", Taylor explores a "strong orientation to inwardness in the transpositions wrought on Augustine by Descartes and Montaigne, and in the practices of disengaged self-remaking, and religious and moral self-exploration, which arise in the early modern period" (389). Taylor suggests that "[t]he modern subject is no longer defined just by the power of disengaged rational control but by this new power of expressive self-articulation as well" intensifying the focus on inner depths, and leading to "an even more radical subjectivism and an internalization of moral sources" (390). It is a tendency which leads into Romantic expressivism, wherein individual self-completion and a sense of the deepest significances of existence are pursued as a common interrelated goal leading to a harmonious unity between the unique individual and the external world. Matthew Arnold, influenced by the German romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (who in turn had taken the ancient Greeks as their exemplum), stressed the role of culture, and individuals'

sense of a determining innermost being - “one’s humour, which is the true truth” (1.4.37) - and the roles reality would have him play - on “vile consideration” (1.4.42), “To calculate, to plot; be rough and smooth / Forward and silent, deferential and cool” (1.4.35-36) – gradually exposes him to the unsettling possibility that attending to the higher purpose his nature has fitted him to will consign him to an uncelebrated and ostensibly purposeless role: “how shall I then explain it to myself / That in blank thought my purpose lives” (2.5.15-16). Dipsychus wonders how, in a world without clear, commonly accepted verities, to reconcile himself to, or to ‘objectively’ justify, the personal choices and sacrifices which would be necessary to his continued observance of ideals he has come to associate with his spontaneous, natural, uncorrupted self. The higher dignity or gratification he associated with fidelity both to his ideals and to what seems to him his true self, are troublingly debunked by a reality which is either oblivious or hostile to the code he favours. In Claude’s case the idea of an incorruptible inner reserve is placed more overtly in counterpoint to what he considers the demeaning necessities of worldly existence.

But for assurance within of a limitless ocean divine, o’er
 Whose great tranquil depths unconscious the wind-tost
 surface
 Breaks into ripples of trouble that come and change and
 endure not, -
 But that in this, of a truth, we have our being, and know
 it,
 Think you we men could submit to live and move as we
 do here?

(III.vi.125-29).

This value or esteem for the idea of a Self, via the abstract discourse it comes to dominate, is not a straightforwardly proud or egotistical disposition, it reflects rather the role of this notion of a determinate inner ‘self’ as an anchor on which such people are forced to rely, and which, consequently, they defend. Given the importance of this core to these characters, their defence, both to themselves and to “the world”, relies heavily on disguising the evidence of their special pleading. The natural torment to the self-made consciousness is the prospect of recognising its first principles, the capacity for objective self-knowledge, as factitious.

interaction with it, as a potential medium of this kind of individual exploration of inner depths as a

Thrown back on the individual responsibility of self-scrutiny, absolute idealists nevertheless still feel compelled or committed to conduct metaphysical equations in universal terms, generalising from their individual circumstances the nature of the defining form they consider these circumstances exemplify. The notion of an inmost I offers the solacing notion that a primary and incorruptible truth exists within; an inviolable internal reality which offers a constant thread to guide the feat of reintegration into a secular world.

Dipsychus' and Claude's desire to believe in the objective reality of their subjectively solacing notions of the potentially authoritative and guiding role of each individuals' 'innermost I', manifests in a kind of quixotic devotion to the higher reality of their solipsisms. As with most instances of quixoticism, Claude's and Dipsychus' 'quests' to realise these notions are further compelled by an undesirable circumstance; the "battle by night" seems to force individuals in on themselves in an attempt to establish a sanctuary and stable ground of unequivocal presumptions.⁵

It was a conscious ethic of Clough's that his work should critique itself and its author. W. David Shaw, in *The Lucid Veil*, identifies Clough as "a poet of uncertainty", who reminds us "that to answer questions is always to delimit arbitrarily a whole *terra incognita* of unknowables".⁶ For all the movements towards reasons, origins, and

component of articulating one's place in a wider context (see 401-10, particularly 408-09).

⁵ Ideas of 'self-knowledge' to which individuals often aspire or cling are inherently contentious, particularly when the individual is beholden to some form of abstract ideal or code of conduct: what appears to be self-knowledge often reveals itself to be a self-image moulded by the idealist's esteem for the idealised code of conduct. Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) provides a particularly explicit example of this kind of subtle self-deception: Lord Jim's romantic idealisation of the duty of an officer is the basis of his sense of intense unworthiness of the esteem or respect he longs to feel warranted in holding for himself. His drifting between jobs and countries after the *Patna* incident sees him searching for an opportunity to participate in action which will prove to himself and "externally" justify the association with a noble code of conduct which his self-esteem still maintains. The persistence of his sense of dignified distinction, of what he's worth, in spite of his recognition that he has factually failed this estimate, is a dilemma he seeks to resolve in his favour. In a sense, Jim's romanticism and the blindness to his own nature which it breeds, are necessary accomplices in his unacknowledged determination to consider himself, in spite of his tangible failure, worthy of a higher truth. The sort of reliance on subjective internal standards, and the necessary defiance of practical directives suggested by external reality, that this kind of interiority breeds, participate in Conrad's *Lord Jim* as the reified points of contention in a juxtaposition of romanticism and practical, finite proportion. This juxtaposition, as conducted by the narrator Marlowe, admits a fundamental uncertainty over the virtue or irresponsibility of Jim's subservience to his "shadowy ideal of conduct". Or rather, Marlowe seems certain of both the irresponsibility and nobility of Jim's conduct, but is unable to resolve or coalesce the contradictory feelings into a stable perspective.

⁶ W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), 141. Shaw argues that in the seeking yet evasive cycles of *Amours* "circling hexameters" Clough dramatises "the anxiety of someone who is conscious of more than he can allow himself to know" (141). The anxiety which deems this knowledge "unallowable" originates in the antagonism between scepticism

credible statements, very little ever emerges from Claude's letters which *he* is able or willing to recognise as a clear step forward. The rigour of Claude's commitment to establishing fundamental propositions, prefixing clause upon clause, appropriately falls victim to an inexhaustible fund of counterpoints and credible alternatives.

Rather than asserting moral anarchy or the decreasing substantiality of the "self" (as John Goode suggests in "*Amours de Voyage: the Aqueous Poem*"⁷), *Amours* dramatises the distemper engendered by the persistent application of a redundant standard of conviction, received or revealed and rigidly absolutist, to a flexible and interactive moral scene. In Claude, Clough depicts the disorientation of a substantial self which cannot assert itself in terms that give its intuitions of truth and purpose preference, and thereby authorise their superintendence, over the panoply of legitimate roles it recognises in the varying points of view that surround it in the everyday world. What Claude experiences as the absence of this approvable point of origin reflects rather *his* inability to *approve* its apparent deviation from the form he had expected it to assume. This inability extends from a persisting emotional esteem for the ideology from which these expectations originate. Claude's misapprehension of this deviation as deprivation leads him to despair of an assured first principle from which to begin seeking truth and satisfactory duty. Consequently he seeks again and again to organise his experiences into something approximating a rite of passage from which he can draw a sense of enlightenment and qualitative change, and distil a fixing certainty.

The disquietude which results from Claude's honest confrontation of uncertainty exposes his own problematic responses to the relationship he gradually discerns between idealistic aspirations and the reality that both stimulates and repudiates them. Claude is dutifully sceptical, and a dutiful absolutist; he can neither ignore the reduction of the idea of absolute authority to a metaphorical crutch for necessary convictions, nor accept the emphasis this reduction (the utter vanity of any attempt on the Absolute, V.v.63) places on the chosen allegiance of the individual. In *Amours*, Claude's experience of Rome is disappointingly different from his expectations. Consequently,

and idealism in an environment where meaning is called on to conform to the provision of an authoritative and unimpeachable narrative.

⁷ John Goode, "*Amours de Voyage: the Aqueous Poem*", *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 275-97

in the ensuing suspension between his desire to be guided by tradition and his doubts about the actual wisdom of the past, he comes to feel abandoned and disoriented.⁸

The inward turn delivers an infinitely plastic realm of possible rationalisations of conviction and satisfying self-representations, but it further isolates the individual from the prospect of involvement and illumination through coercive experiences of unmediated and initially inexplicable aspects of reality.

Claude and Dipsychus are individuals whose palate for worldly experience has been distempered by their indoctrination in a framework of unrealisable certainties and security; this indoctrination supports not only an unrealisable idealism but an impractical commitment to reifying these inspirations. In cumulative contrast, gradually but persistently, Clough allows the multiple facets of secular reality to ambivalently disrupt these desired but obsolete convictions. In the works as a whole these disruptions come to represent a force of ambiguity which, rather than the negating imperviousness it sometimes seems to Claude and Dipsychus, invites new approaches to the role of abstract ideals (such as truth and honour).

Clough and Conviction

Through individuals' tenacious need to test on others (real or imagined) the sense they make of their surroundings, the limitations of emotivist ideologies are typically revealed. Both on the individual level of quests for self-knowledge, and on the general

⁸ In this sense Claude's discoveries of ambiguity and factitious equivocations at the root of many of the conventional consolations of the period (spiritual devotion, worldly duty, love, even sceptical disillusion) anticipates the explorations of fraught responsibilities of individual freedom and cultural inheritance which are a common theme of the modernist writers of the early Twentieth Century. In *Modern Epic* (London & New York: Verso, 1996), Franco Moretti suggests that "[a]t the start of the twentieth century, as though obeying some secret signal, Conrad and Mann, Musil and Rilke, Kafka and Joyce, all set about writing stories of 'formation' [*Bildung*] – in which the *Bildung* does not occur: in which objective culture, congealed in conventions and institutions, no longer helps to construct individual subjects, but wounds and disintegrates them" (195). It should be noted, though, that this wounding and disintegration are invited or, rather, catalysed by the subjects' received conceptions of the kinds of roles these received conventions and institutions *should* play in individuals' development. Subsequent to the failure of these "conventions and institutions" to fulfil a role they seemed bound to by their implied role in some grander pattern, individuals who had based their expectations on the persistence of such order are often overcome with feelings of confusion and abandonment, and of having been arbitrarily betrayed. The hostile implications of this transition, to which Moretti refers – a culture that merely wounds and inhibits those individuals who seek to form an individual identity in collaboration with it – reflect a biased reaction against what is in truth a dysfunctional *relationship*, for which both parties ('objective' culture and the 'developing' individual), with their incompatible (or simply unclear) demands, are responsible. It is the consequence not of a decisive deficiency in objective culture, but rather of the unfamiliarity and anxiety

level to which these naturally turn for abstract approval (idealism), inadequacies of traditional forms and formulae come to signify an upheaval in the orientation of morality from being a universal system of obligations to being one of flexible utilitarian calculations and a merely optional bond.

In 1853, Clough wrote to Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Here is the sort of thing I used to try and represent to you. I went out this morning to do civilities I went first to Frank Newman, with whom a certain Dr. Stamm, abroad on a mission to form a new Religious Union or League – he delivering himself of a sort of Anima Mundi Religion; Humanism I think they call it – F. Newman fraternizing from a Theistic distance – Thence I got to old Crabb Robinson with liberalism and Abolitionism and – etc. Then I went across country and found myself at the Brookfields – where presently in came two ladies, one of whom Mrs. Brookfield's little girl calls Miss Lord Lyttelton, being sister to Lord Lyttelton, I suppose – a very fair specimen of aristocratic tradition. Thence I fell in my walk upon Carlyle ... However, these changes of atmosphere don't affect me as they used to do: - nor do I think much of them now[.]⁹

Clough recounts the ideologies of his acquaintances as the symptoms which, in their variety from a common cause, delineate particular constitutions, preferences and circumstances. The various creeds which Clough turns up in his brief foray are gathered together not as points of rational contention (the relative evaluation is so futile it is not even hinted at) but as reflections of a common act of adaptation; these ideas are suggestively laid out as the various pelts or plumages with which the intellect both decorates and insulates itself (Clough's *Adam and Eve* similarly explores individual creeds, and their varying religiosity, as idiosyncratic responses to situations of extreme moral anxiety and confusion).¹⁰ Clough's depiction of the environment through which his civilities draw him suggests precisely the multiform nature of "truth" of which Claude, in *Amours*, becomes gradually aware. The substantial shocks to the system of these variously compelling "changes of atmosphere" are evident in the turbulence of

which dominates these individuals' reactions to alterations in the roles which culture and abstract ideals can credibly and productively play in their conceptions of and relationships with abstract verities.

⁹ Frederick L. Mulhauser (ed.), *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*, volume 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) letter 403, 463-64.

¹⁰ Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* concentrates much of the philosophical and religious contentions of the time into the half-parodic clothes-philosophy of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. The symbols of traditional religion and knowledge are the ornamental garments of the Dandiacal body, a body whose time has passed; its comforts have been deemed obsolete in recognition of the natural nakedness of the human creature. Clough's poem "*Epi-Strauss-ium*" (1847) – a short response to the implications of the higher criticism of the Bible practiced by the German David Strauss – evokes a similar transition by juxtaposing

ideas that persistently frustrate Claude's desire for stability. This turbulence is also registered more directly in Clough's Oxford Diaries, throughout which his personal attempts to make sense of a confusing array of various and independently credible individual creeds were further burdened with exposure to the compelling though incompatible pseudo-messianic teachings of Carlyle, Newman, Pusey and, from an early age, Dr. Arnold.¹¹ The elements of plausibility and apparent truth within the contrasting doctrines espoused by these esteemed individuals initially troubled Clough's conviction of the needfulness of a single authoritative creed (precisely what he had come to feel the lack of¹²). But as he came to see the contesting convictions of his peers and teachers in relation to particular individuals, rather than an abstraction of truth, the discord of incompatible truths came to suggest a gallery of idiosyncratic expressions, figuratively expressing individual interpretations of the relationship between abstract ideals and the concrete world.

In his diary of 1842, Clough copied down the following passage:

the multi-coloured light falling inside a church through stained-glass windows, to the clear unadulterated, and "more sincerely bright" white light of a faith independent of mystery, artifice and superstition.

¹¹ Clough's Oxford diary entries - see: Anthony Kenny (ed.), *The Oxford Diaries of Arthur Hugh Clough* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) - offer a sketch of the vulnerability and insubstantiality of scepticism in moments when it is not interrogating a proposition.

Here I am with all my imagination truths utterly departed; and a new false growth in their place; so that I cannot act rationally - my affections utterly divorced from both imagination & reason.

(March 1842 - *The Oxford Diaries of Arthur Hugh Clough*, 199).

Clough's suspicious response to the field of apparently empty promises gradually provides its own ballast of honest uncertainty as he becomes accustomed to accepting the veracity of feelings of confusion, rather than considering them flawed impressions of an actual ideal. For instance, "I seem to have got out of my difficulties by the worst possible way - establishing a new [*fancy*], which being independent of other people I am not ashamed to stick to, but is wholly illegitimate all the same" (February 1842 - *Oxford Diaries*, 192). This clarity is not a source of triumphant alleviation or even transient stability, but it does contain the potential for a more direct relationship with a world that exists beyond the intermediary prejudices he discovered to be so important to the 'authority' of received conventions of external order.

¹² In the variety of responses to the erosion of the Christian church's supernatural authority, as arrayed, for example, in A.N. Wilson's *God's Funeral* (London: Abacus, 2000), it is apparent that in the grip of uncertainty, reasons were found to approve orthodox belief, to honourably forego it, to reinterpret the articles of faith, or, having intellectually approved the need for some form of broad moral structure, to profess "faith" (either for intellectual or aesthetic reasons) without actual belief (Wilson discusses, for instance, Bishop Colenso's cynical and conservatively pragmatic approval of the church's authoritative role as a governor of social morality and cohesion). Among these possibilities (which I have stylised somewhat) there are further variations relative to individual motivation and self-awareness. These various responses, though, tend to bear in common traces of a reactionary response to uncertainty, in their tone these responses register its unsettling presence in the background of the certainties their needs and desires encourage them to impute to an intrinsically ambivalent and amoral natural world.

'It is the trial and mystery of our position in this age and country, that a religious mind is continually set at variance with itself, that its defence to what is without contradicts suggestions from within, & that it cannot obey what is over it, without rebelling against what was before it' [.]¹³

Responding to it thus:

In this state of non adjustment, Obedience becomes conformity, conventionality... and shame, while Non-conformity leads us into Passion for Passion's sake, fancy for fancy's sake, that perpetual semi-consciousness of rebellion which leads into rebellion.¹⁴

Clough was consistently concerned with how to live properly, what is to be done with our lives. The "our" here is quite significant. Clough did not simply desire a path by which he could attain a personal assurance and mandate to act. In spite of frequent preoccupation with interiority and self, his work repeatedly troubles itself with the problematic necessity for individual comfort or triumph to be augmented or "activated" by a healthy adherence to a society, ideally of similarly "awake" individuals. Clough's desire for a model of proper living expresses what appears a perennial need for conventions establishing commonly acceptable virtues and life-goals. However, it asserts itself as a paramount dilemma in such periods as Clough's, in which traditional bodies of thought and belief which have previously provided guidelines on which these decisions could be made, have grown stale and lifeless. Through such avenues as higher criticism, natural theology, evolutionary theories, Tractarian squabbles, and prevalent social concerns such as Chartism and labour, the inadequacies of traditional assurances were being emphasised, while the challenges of science and capitalism to the idea of a supernatural authority become more and more trenchant. And though the sediment that has formed around spiritual appetites and concerns is challenged with redundancy, it is a challenge to forms of conceptualisation and expression, while the impulse that forms them seems resilient. This resilience, however, does not attest to the absolute value of any of the particular forms it manifests in but conveys, rather, a persisting need (for transcendent meaning or assurances) which generates and moulds these responses.

Reviewing a book on recent social theories, Clough wrote:

¹³ Kenny (ed.), *The Oxford Diaries of Arthur Hugh Clough*, October, 1842, 215.

¹⁴ Kenny (ed.), *The Oxford Diaries of Arthur Hugh Clough*, October, 1842, 215.

The dream and aspiration of the ardent and generous spirits of our time is for a certain royal road to human happiness. Disappointed a thousand times, they still persist in their exalted creed that there must and will be here on earth, if not now, in some future and approaching time, a state of social arrangement in which the spontaneous action and free development of each individual constituent member will combine to form 'a vast and solemn harmony,' the ultimate perfect movement of collective humanity.¹⁵

To make the nature of this "royal road" clear, "beautiful thoughts will distil as the dew, and fair actions spring up as the green herb".¹⁶ Similar dreams and aspirations play a significant role in the absolutism which is so problematically affirmed by the self-privileging language of the little-Hamlets: a wishful coalescing of the goals of individual self-determination and a belief in the paramount virtue of disinterested commitment to the realisation of a common binding ideal. The universal scope of these terms, though, ironically determines their limited pertinence to any actual circumstance.

Nevertheless, in such a scenario the anxieties of individual freedom and responsibility to choose evaporate, and as they do Clough's language, aping the tone of these particular wishes, balances itself between earnest rhetoric and anxious vagueness. Though often fanciful, abstract idealistic aspirations are not implicitly deluded and demeaning (as *The Spirit* represents them to Dipsychus). Rather, they express a reaction to an uncomfortable state of uncertainty.

O blessed ages of pure, spontaneous, unconscious, unthinking, unreasoning life and action, to you, either in the past or the future, the human heart is still fain to recur – still must dream O blessed ages indeed! But have such, since men were men, ever been? Or are such, while men are men, ever likely to come?¹⁷

The notion that a new order, if such is ever to emerge, could only arrive through something other than human application, allows Clough to act as if he doesn't believe such a thing existed. He is free to register any number of possibilities. While still influenced, and to an extent determined, by the sediment of preceding forms, Clough's depictions are nevertheless free of the panicked reflex to reinstate them. Clough is free to act as if the necessity of authority were something quite different, and therein, to

¹⁵ Clough, "Extracts from a Review of a work entitled 'Considerations on Some Recent Social Theories'", *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, 405-12, 407.

¹⁶ "Extracts from a Review . . .", 407.

¹⁷ "Extracts from a Review . . .", 408.

engage in the contemporary flux as a thoroughly human event. Neither God, nor the divine species of authority God represents are present or dead in the *reality* to which he exposes his characters, merely in their psychology. It is the balance, the poise and retention between coexisting currents of doubt and faith, that means Clough can allow any number of antinomies and paradoxical contradictions to jostle within and around his curious and characteristically oscillating characters - engaged/disengaged, certain/uncertain - in response to the same stimuli. An indomitable variousness is always allowed to emerge and challenge the inadequacy of systematic truths, and to expose the compromising necessity of adopting a selective truth in order to commit to an ideal.

In 1849, defending the resignation of his Oxford tutorship to Provost Hawkins, Clough wrote:

I don't think young men are at all inclined to part with Christianity, absolutely: but they have no Christian ideal, which they feel sure is really Christian, except the Roman Catholic. Any middle term is felt to be a sort of mixed Christianity; and whence that admixture comes they are not careful to enquire, nor in what quantity it may be admitted: - but they have a growing sense of discrepancy.¹⁸

In *Amours*, as in *Dipsychus*, ideals assured by a history of divine involvement are scrutinised for their ability to support a sceptical secular order; Clough deploys

¹⁸ Clough to E. Hawkins, *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough, volume 1*, ed. F.L. Mulhauser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), letter 214, 249. Elements of the advice Provost Hawkins had given to Clough when he was debating whether he could maintain, in good faith, his subscription to the 39 Articles, are placed in The Spirit's mouth. in *Dipsychus*, as it tries to persuade Dipsychus to submit to worldly compromise.

Take larger views (and quit your Germans)
From the Analogy and Sermons;
I fancied - you must doubtless know,
Butler had proved an age ago,
That in religious as profane things,
'Twas useless trying to explain things;
(2.1.47-52).

The Spirit's direction to consult Bishop Butler's "Analogy" (the *Analogy of Religion* (1736)), for example, directly echoes advice Hawkins had offered Clough (see: *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough, volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), letter 190, 225-27). In this setting Hawkins' arguments are utilised to oppose a pompous, or precious, devotion to idealistic non-conformity; the alternative here, though, is not conservative religious orthodoxy, it is "Men's business-wits, the only sane things, / These and compliance are the main things" (2.1.53-54). Clough recontextualises the arguments with which Hawkins had tried to convince him of the prudence of 'pragmatic' subscription to denounce the undignified casuistry and unnecessary bad faith which this argument seemed to ask of him.

characters of a particular habitual pattern of perception and expectation into a realm of uncertainties. They bring to this realm habits of thinking, sets of ideas and expectations about the nature and role of absolute truths and life-goals. In particular, they strive to reaffirm the certainties they associate with the previous age of faith by interrogating or appealing to the supposed truths of revealed religion, and the type of order which these sanction.

The practical and emotional implications which proceed from Claude's and Dipsychus' habitual dependence on these patterns reveal their obsolescence as feasible guides of conduct. Through the particulars of this revelation (the particular conceptual strategies which succeed or fail), the flexible, multifaceted, and nebulous nature of the realm of uncertainty is implied by way of what it recognisably isn't. In this revealing reaction, the various forms of abstract order appear as metaphoric devices resorted to as real things, in attempts to impose a moral dimension over what is actually and ambivalently supported or dismissed by the realm of uncertainties. These generalised schemes attempt to dictate what should or should not occur in a "good" world, allowing personal dissatisfactions to be expressed in the semblance of disinterested judgements of a delinquent reality. They provide individuals, ultimately, with what they consider objective grounds on which to challenge the natural world's ambivalence towards human hierarchies of meaning. In Clough's work, though, it is apparent that this kind of attempt to reaffirm abstract order cannot resolve the uncertainties of the present. Such attempts do, however, provide these characters with metaphors to compensate for their loss of real convictions (metaphors which are easily and sometimes eagerly mistaken for the idea or ideal they evoke). Throughout *Amours* this metaphoric relationship is intimated in the actual standard of knowledge and truth which Claude discovers in his attempts to make himself, his beliefs, and impressions absolutely clear. None of Claude's factitious postures and ephemeral inspirations are entirely false - each role has a kind of superficial credibility, as a reaction to a particular stress or circumstance, which is subsequently unravelled by Claude as he assesses their *essential* pertinence or inhibitiveness, in rendering his actual thoughts and feelings - they are incapable, though, of providing the coherent certainties by which he expects to recognise the genuine dictates of an absolute authority. It is not abstract ideals, *per se*, against which Clough's satire is directed, but against individuals' unwillingness or inability to accept that reality has no obligation to comply with them.

Claude's literal remoteness from habitual convention parallels his metaphysical disorientation. Burdened by, though hardly believing in, received attitudes and expectations forged under divine authority, he familiarises himself with the new terrain of secular responsibility as if struggling to make himself at home in a new locale: he begins to accept customs which, though unfamiliar *to him*, seem apt to his circumstances. In the metaphysical sense, then, Claude is like an exile from a convention that had sustained, even if cynically or uncritically, a presumption of the desirability and possibility of moral absolutes and transcendent order. Regardless of whether he ever believed in God, *per se*, and has lost his faith in this sense, confidence in a world ordered by a sympathetic, external and infallible authority is lost to him. The idea of such an authority remains with him (a spectre he repeatedly sees through, but whose misleading appearances he never altogether resents), as an abstract template against which to judge the disorderly world, but absolute faith and the aspiration to somehow participate in reifying any such template is not a "vocation" to which he can return.

Claude's deflective wit allows him to unravel and display the defence mechanisms contained within the dubious expressions of certainty on which he nevertheless is emotionally dependent. His emotional need and intellectual rigour are intertwined in mutual disruption, but the willingness to acknowledge the complicity of honesty and absurdity allows a dignifying pathetic humour to drown out the futility which often, and unfairly, partners the acceptance of finite limitations in the wake of the great expectations absolutism encourages.

Claude's scepticism is tinged with suspicion "I do not like being moved: for the will is excited; and action / Is a most dangerous thing" (II.xi.270-71); it polices his aversion to what he sees as the seductive and corrupting directives of worldly convention, its merely customary or received beliefs and convictions, and on his own belief that an unimpeachable authority, which cannot be unravelled in the way worldly convention can, exists, or will exist. So, while "Waiting, and watching, and looking" (II.xi.278), Claude is bolstered by his idealisation of compelling external inspiration which "without our knowledge or conscious effort" (II.xi.280), will show itself to be genuine grounds for convinced action rather than "some malpractice of the heart" (II.xi.272).¹⁹ Claude's commitment to a "perfect and absolute something" (III.vi.144)

¹⁹ Dipsychus admits to a similar policy of cautious scrutiny of the feelings and ideas prompted by the external world:

tyrannises over his relationships with the events of his life. He brings a rigorous scepticism to bear on his unavoidably particular consolations and feelings, even when he is most in need of their comfort and semblance of support.²⁰

What with trusting myself and seeking support from
within me
Almost I could believe I had gained a religious assurance,
Found in my own poor soul a great moral basis to rest on.
Ah, but indeed I see, I feel it factitious entirely;
I refuse, reject, and put it utterly from me;
I will look straight out, see things, not try to evade them:
Fact shall be fact for me;
(V.v.95-101).

While such habits (which, though openly affirmed by Claude only at the end of the poem, have been apparent in his thought pattern and manner throughout) might guard him against factitious enthusiasms, they also undercut his ability to develop on any emotional foundation, and forestall the consequences which might follow from an admission that he has been moved (he need not acknowledge, for instance, that his feelings for Mary were real and precious regardless of the ambiguities they contained).

When Claude begins to recognise his own affinity for the Republic to be less disinterested and lofty than he had initially felt it to be, he becomes equally embarrassed both for the cause (which has *failed* to inspire him with self-sacrificing devotion), and for the naïvete and eagerness of his desire to believe that some external agent of justice might grant the Republicans' a triumph over their oppressors. He can no longer respond to the cause as if to a pure abstract 'good' (untainted by particular interests or moral ambiguities), and he is not disposed to find in it anything else (a worthwhile strategic protest in a political conflict, for example).

Yet I could think indeed the perfect call
Should force the perfect answer. If the Voice
Ought to receive its echo from the soul,
Wherefore this silence?
(2.4.63-66).

By his absolutist standards, the absence of this echo disproves the worthiness of any of the claims being made upon him, no voice calls with adequate authority so he feels justified in maintaining his idealistic inertia.

²⁰ This tendency is succinctly prefigured in one of the epigrams to the poem "Il doutait de tout, même de l'amour" (he doubted everything, even love).

Though Claude recognises in the Republic's cause a logic of propriety or justice, this recognition lacks any truly felt, internal significance (in short, it is not his fight). From the fact that Claude can intellectually affirm the republicans' principles, but not involve himself without feeling himself giving way to infatuated unsubtlety, or a cynical indulgence of a thoroughly general approval of revolution, he is forced to admit the circumstantial or contingent value of their ostensibly absolute ideals. The general ideals of the republican fight are dependent on the particular significance which gives their abstract credibility a compelling emotional sanction for the rebels, and at this level Claude must recognise the limited emotional purchase on him of what remains a theoretically just cause. The great cause gives way to a local political struggle which, beyond its particular context, cannot support the kind of general rhetoric it employs. Claude is a gauge of this: his gradual indifference to the initially compelling generalised cause suggests an awakening to the way in which absolute terms are used by internally dependent groups (or individuals) to express and privilege their shared feelings of the general and authoritative validity of an experience which is generated within a particular circumstance. Rather than manifestations of objective external categories, validating the absolute propriety of their commitment, the convictions which Claude envies the republicans are expressive self-referential terms.

FAREWELL, Politics, utterly! What can I do? I cannot
 Fight, you know; and to talk I am wholly ashamed. And
 although I
 Gnash my teeth when I look in your French or your
 English papers,
 What is the good of that? Will swearing, I wonder, mend
 matters?
 Cursing and scolding repel the assailants? No, it is idle;
 No, whatever befalls, I will hide, will ignore or forget it.
 Let the tail shift for itself; I will bury my head. And
 what's the
 Roman Republic to me, or I to the Roman Republic?
 (III.iii.60-67).

It is the embarrassment which Claude feels at his inability to transform his idealistic impulses into action which determines the exaggeratedly adamant resignation from this field; the disillusion which accompanies this resignation though is surprisingly good humoured.

Claude makes fun of his own propensity to justify his uncommitted inertia as the consequence of decisions taken on rational grounds. Listing his reasons Claude seems amused by their hollow ring, and concludes with a rather cruelly barbed exaggeration of the lip-service which turns so readily, in the absence of active commitment, to hypocrisy. Perhaps in this sentiment one could perceive a grain of self-loathing, but Claude's sarcasm is not of an acidic or destructive nature; it is not jeering or superior. Nor does Claude condemn himself: predominantly, it seems, Claude would prefer to make of himself a clownish figure, a squeamish fop, and though he might feel shamefully stupid, it is with a resigned fondness rather than anguish that he considers his failings.

Why not fight? – In the first place, I haven't so much
as a musket.
In the next, if I had, I shouldn't know how I should use it.
In the third, just at present I'm studying ancient marbles.
In the fourth, I consider I owe my life to my country.
In the fifth, - I forget; but four good reasons are ample.
Meantime, pray let 'em fight, and be killed. I delight in
devotion.
So that I 'list not, hurrah for the glorious army of martyrs!
(III.iii.68-74).

Claude's necessary explanation - like the similar appeal, "no man / Feels quite distinct the assurance that he of all others is called on, / Or would be justified, even, in taking away from the world that / Precious creature, himself" (II.ii.32-35) - provides a focus for all manner of refracted images of duty, unacknowledged responsibilities, and a guilty awareness of genuine disinterest. These eruptions of self-parody and half-embarrassed self-exoneration represent moments in which Claude relents to exploit the seductive but dubious control afforded by irony and satire. They emerge sporadically from a background of speculative ambiguity, involved argument, mawkishness and sentimentality and in reaction to an emotional background of confusion, need and naïvete. That Claude cannot furnish Eustace with the fifth reason not to fight, is due solely to the dwindling momentum of his *ad hoc* flippancy. Claude becomes embarrassed, as he had after his critical portrait of the Trevellyns' middle class pretensions, by the delimiting flourishes with which he deploys both genuine criticism and self-indulgent snobbery. Claude's playful self-justification is burdened with the

half-embarrassed recognition that it could well be construed “a weak and ignoble refining, / Wholly unworthy the head or the heart of Your Own Correspondent?” (II.iv.93-94).

The juggling of a variety of compulsions, courage of convictions, obligation to abstract ideas, absence of emotional involvement, inability to consummate theory, cowardice hiding in “reasons”, cowardice admitting itself in the flimsiness of its reasoning, suggests a step towards acceptance of all of these as a muddle of possibilities, all generated within the mind and constituting an expression of its competence to comprehend its incompetence.

It is the essence of Clough’s portrayal of an experience of the dissolution of absolutes that Claude’s attempts to utter convictions remain unresolved. Though Claude’s manner implies that he rarely knows what to make of his utterances, in the context of the poem his fidelity to this confusion allows its significance to emerge. In conjunction with Claude’s inherited desires and habits of critical thought the ambiguity he resists but cannot resolve conveys a potent signal. The combination of ostensible certainty, or expressed conviction, with this tone of ambivalence confronts Claude directly with the absurd paucity of his ontological and epistemological resources.²¹ It is Claude’s fidelity to “what is” that allows this absurdity to resist a diluting transposition into freedom or travesty. Claude is amused by the sound of his attempts to express convictions, but in spite of the awkwardness and absurdity that accompany the persisting incapacity to locate them, he is no less eager to find the right words. The disharmony of his individual intuitions and his universalist utterances jars in his own ear, and in the readers’ with extra absurdity in that Clough allows us to wonder not only at the inadequacy of Claude’s tools to his purpose (discovering absolutely valid foundations of equivocation and purpose), but the credibility of this purpose also.²²

²¹ In *The Proud Knowledge: Poetry, Insight and the Self, 1620-1920* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), John Holloway suggests that “[o]nce the poet as quizzical bystander turns his detachment and quizzicality upon himself, there has to be a multiple, an endless reiteration of the movements both of submission before dubiety and at the same time of rising above it through the very act of registering it” (141). The terms of Holloway’s delineation, “submission” and “rising above”, seem inappropriate: they imply the continuing project of a plausible systematisation which logically “submission” would surrender. The real triumph exists in perceiving, from within that act of surrender, the imposition of a false requirement which seduces the registering of confusion into conceiving of itself as a rising above it. This mistakes familiarity, the sense of awareness, for the experience of control, and though this association does occur, the consolatory terms of truth in which it robs itself are inherently dubious.

²² Claude’s eventual deflation of his own attempts to muster conviction reflects the happily diminished scale of the gamletiki and faustuli. Between Werther and Claude the pathology of suicide experiences a change of atmosphere, the support for an ideological act of both sacrifice and self-worship becomes a pompous act entirely out of scale with the significance of self-consciousness. The dramatic tragedy

Following his inability to engage with reality in the terms his abstract invocations favour, it is true that Claude returns to their removed realm of theoretical idealism with an air of resignation. Nevertheless, to see Claude (as Robert Micklus does²³) as a man “stymied by his fear of a world he cannot comprehend”, and alienated as he “blindly refuses to appreciate *l’amour de voyage* of modern life”²⁴ - is to accept this air of resignation as something like a strategic and dishonourable retreat from a worthy but over-taxing struggle. What Micklus sees as Claude’s complete resignation to “the world of abstraction”²⁵ is Claude’s recourse to release-valves, familiar and reliable, which are the last resort of his need to invoke or gesture to the idea of a clear authority. The affiliation with idealism and abstraction which they struggle to resuscitate are enchantments that the old language of absolutes and transcendent ideals, having lost its link to a commonly accepted authority (such as God), can only assert, rather than serve. While acknowledging that even in this final retreat Claude remains uncommitted, Micklus treats the presence of this language as a sign of *convinced* preference for abstract certainties over the dynamism of modern life.²⁶

Werther seems compelled to impose as the shape of his existence is one more of the postures that reveal themselves as two-dimensional costumery in Clough’s aqueous realm. While refusing to resolve the ambiguity and uncertainty which prompts so much of Claude’s self-deprecating and paradoxical precision and disorientation Clough’s humour in *Amours* thrives on the resilience and reluctant wisdom provoked through Claude’s involvement with his own defied expectations.

²³ Robert Micklus, “A Voyage of Juxtapositions: The Dynamic World of *Amours de Voyage*”, *Victorian Poetry*, 18 (1980), 407-414.

²⁴ Micklus “A Voyage of Juxtapositions: The Dynamic World of *Amours de Voyage*”, 414.

²⁵ Micklus “A Voyage of Juxtapositions: The Dynamic World of *Amours de Voyage*”, 413.

²⁶ Micklus has a habit of keeping Claude to his words, perceiving in them a more scrutinised and approved conviction than seems fitting. Micklus gives little regard to the conversational setting, determined by currents of rhetorical effusion, evasive clutter and vigorous ephemera as much as by attempts at truth-telling, and Claude’s fluctuations are consequently treated as convictions rather than tentative reflections of changing states of mind.

Similarly, comments like John Goode’s: “I don’t know how Houghton can talk of Claude’s fear of sex. What he fears is the factitious rhetoric of institutionalised love; ‘let love be its own inspiration’ ” (Goode in Armstrong 1969, 288), can only stand unqualified if we have faith in Claude’s capacity for objective self-evaluation. But one of the foremost “plots” of *Amours* is Claude’s traumatic inability to realign definitive expression of internal conviction with lasting external credibility. Goode’s objection emphasises Claude’s conscientious objection at the expense of recognising Claude’s characteristic inability to affirm coherent principles and the primacy, therefore, of aversion and justifications of restraint in determining his reactions. “Ah, let me look, let me watch, let me wait, unhurried, unprompted! / Bid me not venture on aught that could alter or end what is present!” (II.xii.274-75). Exaggerating the critical acuity of Claude’s isolation ignores the potent stimulus afforded by his feelings of inadequacy. This inadequacy suggests the presence of an idealist’s disappointed scepticism rather than a self-satisfied triumph over enthusiasm.

The source of this “blind refusal” is the hangover of idealism; it is not a choice, it is the recognition of an inability, and again the “air” of resignation, ambivalent and dubious, reveals a desire thwarted, as if by poor tools, and not, therefore, dispersed.

“Decisions” for Claude inevitably appear as the hopeful seed of a certainty rather than its fruitful representation. Claude’s attempts to prime the pump of conviction, like Hamlet’s self-exhortation, “from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!“, convey the uncertainty of a faltering experiment in self-authorisation.²⁷ The tone of voice conveys awareness both of what is required and the speaker’s lack of it. Claude’s epistles become a crucible for experiment and observation of the relationship that binds conviction, communication and consistency together as an alchemical source of decisiveness.

In *The Bothie*, Phillip Hewson and his undergraduate friends muse on the relative virtues of the life of the soil and the grafted existence amidst urban modernity: “Truly I see a good deal in the daisy-carnation fable; / Though I should like to be clear what standing in the earth means” (II.269-70). Phillip is not entirely serious, he is after all reflecting on the allegorical desirability or otherwise of a cut carnation, a rooted carnation and a rooted daisy. Neither, though, is he merely joking: to understand how one ought to lay down roots is the first principle of growth; and it is this principle which

Goode himself acknowledges that in seeking stable roles “it is the language which is treacherous” (in Armstrong 1969, 286); this treachery reflects an atmosphere in which self-perceptions and preferences come forth under inherent suspicion of performing strategic seductions. This implicit suspicion is endemic following the detachment of the abstract language of idealism from an external, or “higher”, discourse capable of satisfactorily validating its practical credibility. In Clough’s portrayal of the sceptical individual’s static poise and retention the legitimacy of the various consequences of this detachment are apparent. As a profile of the fertile and redundant elements of both factitiousness and fact, the symptoms of this circumstance of apparent deprivation provide something akin to a key to the anatomy of idealism. But it is the anatomy of a human organ not an independent body. Clough’s abstraction is vital, interconnected and thoroughly dependent on the body it belongs to (be it social or singular).

Goode seems to give rather too much credence to certain of Claude’s utterances, seeing in them not the contingent orientation of the self but rather a legitimate insight or certainty of a supposedly insubstantial self. “Do I look like that? you think me that: then I am that” (I.iv.86), for Goode becomes “I am that” (Goode, 277). But are we really to understand that Claude believes he isn’t *also* that which he deems himself? A self, therefore, capable of differentiating between, though not necessarily of evaluating, external and internal facets of identity. This temptation to extract isolated moments of certainty from the lapping waves of Claude’s convictions is typical of much critical response to *Amours*. Goode, more than other critics, allows for the erosion that inevitably follows but seems, nevertheless, to avoid asking why Claude, at the moments he recognises the constriction of his horizons, might be making his implicit requests for some other sort of relationship between semblance and being aside from the one he experiences. Why, that is, he is dissatisfied with society’s right to perceive him in ways that challenge his ideal conception of himself. Claude’s intimations of the potential insubstantiality of self always exist in collaboration with his desire for the opposite. The momentum and the role of this desire are dismissed in Goode’s neglect of the implicit evasions and ellipses within the language of idealism which the relationships between Claude’s abstract and worldly concerns so convincingly decodes.

²⁷ *Hamlet*, 4.4.65-66.

the unrequited quests of Clough's later characters, Claude and Dipsychus, seek to discover. Claude reflects:

I, who believed not in her, because I would fain believe
nothing,
Have to believe as I may, with a wilful, unmeaning
acceptance.
I, who refused to enfasten the roots of my floating
existence

(V.v.64-66).

Ungrounded by any consistent standard Claude finds himself unable to authoritatively judge the external forces that move around him, and unable to order his disparate reactions to them into a pattern containing a compelling whole. He is at the mercy of juxtaposition (circumstantial happenings), intellectual curiosity and emotion, but nothing lasts, nothing solidifies into a conviction, or even a necessary compromise, because nothing needs to: he is independent, unemployed, apparently financially secure and restless; because he exists in a sort of limbo, Claude is free to find his abstract ideals hollow without being forced into evasions or disillusion.

Attempting to discriminate between authentic and factitious elements in the conventions of truth and value, Claude looks for legitimate lineages: he hopes to discriminate healthy traditions (implying lasting prospects, and reflecting perennial needs, such as consolation, duty and vocation) from seductive misgrowths or mere convention. The potential fertility of this approach aside, though, Claude is bound to experience the world's ambivalence, which has been the backdrop and prompt to these finite myths and talismans, as a betrayal of his desire to recognise a path of certainty, and an obstruction of his obligation and entitlement to serve an absolute.

Although Claude becomes aware of the aqueous nature of the moral foundations of his world, his *desire* to discern certain virtues and a certain self in relation to them, distempers his palate and renders fluid ambivalence a state of inadequacy and deprivation. Claude uses water images and evocations of rootlessness to register discomfort and disorientation.²⁸

²⁸ E. Warwick Slinn, in *The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & London: Macmillan, 1991), writes:

Claude's story of love, then, and of his voyage on the fluid medium of his oceanic metaphors provides no Romantic model of growth and development, no movement

'This is nature,' I said: 'we are born as it were from her
 waters,
 Over her billows that buffet and beat us, her offspring
 uncared-for,
 Casting one single regard of a painful victorious
 knowledge,
 Into her billows that buffet and beat us we sink and are
 swallowed.'

(III.ii.51-54).

Then, with the statue of a Triton (half man, half fish) in front of him, the "simpler thought" follows: "Let us not talk of growth; we are still in our Aqueous Ages" (III.ii.58-59). This simple thought transforms Nature's uncaring relationship with her offspring from the semblance of punishing deprivation to reflecting an inadequacy that is merely the sign of an ambivalence to human abstractions. The prospect changes from decay to freedom.

Claude's acknowledgment of the "aqueous age" emerges as the disillusioned backwash of his Republican enthusiasms (during which he bids farewell to politics, "utterly!" (III.iii.60). In compensating Claude for the lost posture of conviction, his declarations of the inherently fluid nature of truth and moral distinctions are channelled towards the same decisive manner that had marked his tentative certainty in the virtue of heroic sacrifice. Knowledge is mourned at this point as "the needless, unfruitful

towards personal transcendence or universal insight, no crowning realisation of some ultimate teleological purpose. It is closer to a dialectical model where opposites dissolve and are continually in a state of transition. Claude does not move towards a moment of fulfilment but simply to a realisation of the way in which he is a decentred participant in process.

The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry, 113.

But Claude himself does not actually ever arrive at this *realization*. While the momentum and implications of Clough's poem point the reader in this direction (suggesting, that is, that such a realisation is the solution Claude's problems invite), Claude never explicitly conceives of himself in the decentred terms the poem allusively promotes; that he cannot do so is as much the point of the poem as the aptness of doing so. Claude remains at the mercy of his desire, in spite of its unrequitable essence, for the "crowning realisation" of an unimpeachable teleological purpose. To confuse these origins of awareness is to discredit the role of Claude's dissatisfaction within the aqueous world Clough depicts. While growth towards the goal of this desire is improbable, it offers at least a template against which to organise the fluctuations of desire, satisfaction, self-knowledge and individual proportion: a point of orientation that has no discriminating moral license unto itself but which offers a co-ordinate for continuous acts of contextualisation, achieved through the scrutiny of the discord and discrepancies which individuals' fluctuating predispositions, preferences and preconceived ideas provoke and encounter in the world.

blossom" (III.iv.84), a description which acknowledges an objective finding and registers Claude's feeling that, somehow, a worthy ideal has been betrayed by reality.

Rationales of consolation and commitment interfuse throughout Clough's work, but their interrelation is perhaps best represented in Claude's image of the "wet sands", cyclically crowded with transient water birds.

Ah, but ye that extrude from the ocean your helpless
faces,
Ye over stormy seas leading long and dreary processions,
Ye, too, brood of the wind, whose coming is whence we
discern not,
Making your nest on the wave, and your bed on the
crested billow,
Skimming rough waters, and crowding wet sands that
the tide shall return to,
Cormorants, ducks, and gulls, fill ye my imagination!
Let us not talk of growth; we are still in our Aqueous
Ages.

(III.iv.91-97).

In its immediate contrast to the ocean which it seems to delimit, the significance and partial stability of this half-solid ground appears, to the fatigued and longing individuals who huddle on it, to constitute the bedrock they desire, and which they are predisposed to ascribe to any assurance that seems to offer absolute certainty.²⁹

Claude observes that the tides shall return to the wet sands again and again. The temporarily solid ground in this conceit suggests the common substance of the assurances which individuals approve as the basis of coherent systems of ideas. The anxiety which precedes Claude's "simpler thought" on viewing the statue of the Triton, reflects his devotion to establishing the possibility of re-establishing solid ground in the face of what appears a wholly natural and uncontestable flux. The image of the Triton, and similarly the "cormorants, ducks, and gulls" that "nest on the wave", suggest forms naturally suited to their environment (III.iv.94-96). Claude can acknowledge and approve of their propriety but he is reluctant to disavow the charms of an authoritative

²⁹ In similar imagery of shores and oceans, desire and fatigue, Prince Myshkin, in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, notes how young Russians', with an intense 'thirst' for certainty but no Christian ideal, find the solid shore of atheism as comforting as the antithetical religious faith that had nurtured their 'thirst' to begin with. That they might remain uncommitted, floating in a sea of ambiguities, is unconceivable both for Myshkin and for Dostoevsky, for whom the 'thirst' for an ideal to bow down to is simply a law of human nature.

ethical foundation. Nevertheless, Claude does appear to accept the possibility that existing as a participant of flux rather than the axis around which it must form a pattern is the only posture which does not travesty the natural world. The Triton serves as a provocative embodiment of flexible hybridity, and offers Claude a striking contrast to his ungainliness in the new habitat of ambiguous truths and guidelines, and a template for possible acclimatisation.

In the wake of Claude's political engagement, certainty becomes associated with the tidal fluctuations of the "wet sands". In place of the committed self-sacrifice of the republican martyrs, his imagination fills with images of "cormorants, ducks, and gulls"; flotsam, responding to tidal movement rather than generating or controlling it.

Any implication that by the end of the poem Claude has found for himself, in facts, knowledge or scepticism, a solid foundation, is undercut by the comparison of a surface to which he must actively and consciously "cling" with "the rich earth" in which he might have taken root (V.v.67). The former, associated with "the hard, naked rock" (V.v.67) of abstract consolations, implies a posture requiring an unnatural and distorting grasp of reality.

In Clough's work, the clear-sighted individual appears necessarily rootless and removed from sequence. This prompts anxiety for the idea of sequence and an inability to proceed without a sense of it. As the attitudes which conventional tropes of sequence traditionally complemented are found to be factitious, and therefore obsolete as foundations of further "progress", Clough's poems reveal the discomfort of dissociation to lie primarily in the persisting esteem for absolutes and for the images of certainty which they had seemed to offer.³⁰

In the clear-sightedness and openness which Claude's confrontation with his own inability to resolve uncertainty ultimately achieves, the pattern of the disappointed idealists' self-perpetuating cynicism is disrupted. Because the consoling conviction of reality's deficiency in relation to "what-should-be" no longer has to be maintained, this pattern becomes unnecessary.

By echoing abstract convictions and "truths" after they have been noticeably altered by contingencies of expressive interaction, Clough implies that no such truth or belief is

³⁰ Clough allows the reader to recognise that the literal or absolute authority of such platforms is only apparently crucial; they are gestures, imaginary scaffolding: as well as compelling Claude's obligation to formulate and weigh his criticisms in general terms, his reverence for abstract ideals provides psychological support which sustains him in his isolating protests against the status quo.

self-evidently credible. Absolute conviction, in this scenario, implies anxious pretence and evasion; in *Amours*, all ideas are fluid, they alter with time, situation and use. The essence of these ideas is inevitably revealed as idiosyncratic, rather than generally typical, and they frequently wither under the generalising urge of Claude's attempts to express himself with conventional forms of conviction and closure. The unimpeachable breadth of significance he needs and therefore seeks to give them is their undoing as he revisits them with the expectation that the essence of the idea will have maintained the glow of authority bestowed by the circumstance of their conception, and the formal gestures into which they are habitually transposed.

Great is Fate, and is best. I believe in Providence, partly.
What is ordained is right, and all that happens is ordered.
Ah, no, that isn't it.

(V.viii.176-78).

Claude's attempt to form some sort of creed, capable of giving order to his disappointment and a mooring point to his uncertainty of his own beliefs and feelings, gathers momentum briefly, but the certainty of the embryonic catechism is unacceptable. Again, as the poem closes, Claude seeks to gather his findings into something like an orderly cohering credo:

Faith, I think, does pass, and Love; but Knowledge
abideth.
Let us seek Knowledge; - the rest must come and go as
it happens.
Knowledge is hard to seek, and harder yet to adhere to.
Knowledge is painful often; and yet when we know, we
are happy.
Seek it, and leave mere Faith and Love to come with
the chances.

(V.x.198-202).

In spite of the internal consistency and reasonableness of these deductions, they seem to offer no unified assurance or real consolation (for Claude, and for many idealists like him, the happiness of knowing is still diluted by disappointment and disillusion); Claude retreats, resignedly, to concrete fact "tomorrow I hope to be starting for Naples" (V.x.203).

Claude's multiple failures to approve a moral stance or foundation, both in practice and expression, attests to the inadequacy of a certain type of moral enterprise to the aqueous age Clough places him in. The Roman Republicans, expecting defeat, fought to bring attention to their cause. In contrast, Claude's failure rebounds on the mode of abstractly intellectualised morality for which he stands as a quixotic bastion in a world that has moved beyond it. Claude's continuing emotional attachment to the idea of absolute certainty motivates the kind of rigorous and problematic sceptical scrutiny through which he discovers ambiguity at the heart of every apparently authoritative posture or convention. This self-thwarting commitment to absolutism delivers Claude into a position in which he is disillusioned but emotionally bound to illusion.

In dramatising the difficulties incumbent on traditional forms of self-exploration, self-knowledge and self-expression when conducted on the crested billows of flexible secular morality, *Amours* affords intimations of an unacknowledged short-circuit between the reality and appearance of ideological discourse.

Aside from its apparently justified deflations of the variety of enthusiasms he is visited by, the proficiency of Claude's scepticism gives him scant gratification (after all, in spite of his commitment to rational doubt, Claude longs for some inspiration or conviction which his scepticism cannot deflate). This inability to be satisfied by the proper procedure of a rational interaction with the natural world reflects the persisting desire for an absent form of unifying authority. Throughout Clough's poetry, this desire combines with sceptical rigour to produce genuinely ambivalent reflections of the predicament of secular ideology. Claude is more than a disruptively critical camera through which the received postures of human interaction are viewed; his dissecting doubtfulness is simultaneously nurtured and insulted by a potent longing for an unimpeachable abstract truth. While often manifesting as a corrosive and negating force, scepticism implicitly expresses a profoundly hopeful fidelity to the possibility of discerning common truths.

Claude's wit gives voice to a genuine regret in the disjunction of idealistic language and direct meaning, but at the same time it thrives tenaciously on bearing witness to the absurdities revealed through this breach. Alongside the attempt to control this disjunction, the inability to satisfactorily do so gives Claude's letters, and his

implicit manner, the nervous instability which sees him wavering between laconic urbanity, earnest confusion and over-strident declamation.

Claude's real discovery is perhaps that his habits identify a natural commitment to uncommitted intellectual inquiry (not knowledge, but scrutiny): beyond doubt, uncertainty and dissatisfaction his motivation to decipher, dissect and discuss persists. That is, in the intellectual and emotional interaction which Claude's letters to Eustace appear to sustain, Clough depicts an assuring relationship to doubt (rather than any assurance capable of dispelling it). In Claude's need for this, Clough depicts a resilient, flexible and inherently moral appetite, which seeks re-evaluation and agreement rather than passively accepting received truth.

When an individual longs for conviction but is unable to approve any single posture as worthy of it, both the possibility of religious faith and the possibility of secular contentment are simultaneously disrupted by the attractions of the other. The humour with which Clough explores this dilemma sustains a fondness for the characters it ensnares, while at the same time it rigorously exposes the flaws in their ideals of knowledge, control and comfort. Rather than the bitterness of the turned idealist, which both Claude and Dipsychus flirt with, Clough's non-ideological "waiting" can countenance the broken promises of idealism without a sense of personal betrayal or spiteful deprivation.

In Clough's work, characters' attempts to locate and profess abstract absolutes come to suggest consoling rituals in themselves, or symbolic performances which invoke laws that are no longer commonly accepted or credible. These performances can be criticised, enjoyed and appreciated, and though their credibility can be challenged, qualified and tempered, it cannot be either dismissed or verified (except in relation to their shifting claims of authority, which inevitably melt away). In this distinction the worth of abstract ideological utterances is clarified not eradicated. Communication and contention together constitute the tempering trial through which individuals can gauge which aspects of their ideals and ideologies are credible to others and which are merely credible to them.³¹ The "perfect and absolute something" (III.vi.144), whether as a

³¹ The radically "democratic account" of language which Isobel Armstrong, in *Victorian Poetry*, identifies in Clough's work reflects his evolution: "of a radical language, not by inventing a notional 'common', universally accessible speech abstracted as a norm, nor by inventing a condescending imitation of the language of the poor, but by enabling language to become the object of democratic investigation" (180-81). Which is to say that in Clough's poetry the use of language inevitably reveals the particularity of its specific involvement with the self or group it serves; "Language thus becomes the communal, social possession formed by particular groups" (181). While language wanes as a fund of common meaning,

particular promise of external reward or as the emblematic notion which encourages individuals' to surrender to subjective impressions of authority, is an ultimately isolating grail. Even Claude's projected triumph of his individual fidelity to an ideal, a revelation "Which I then for myself shall behold, and not another", seems necessarily dour in its self-sufficient righteousness (III.vi.145).

II.

Dipsychus – The Discomforts of an Uncertain Conviction

The discrediting of a moral authority is often troubling for the disorientation it breeds but it is troubling also for the self-doubt it introduces into individuals confidence in their capacity to discriminate the real from the fanciful. What had seemed so compelling and so right is exposed as illusion, generating a reluctance to trust the only faculty remaining, individual judgement, for the re-orientation to the responsibilities and entitlements of abstract morality. Individuals deprived of an absolute and seeking a new authority to support their desire for moral certainty, seem to find themselves hesitant to trust their convictions to anything tainted by the subjective distortions of sentiment or emotion. Claude, in *Amours*, resorts to the protective incantation, "Fact shall be fact for me" (V.v.101), to guard him from the delusory certainty of such factitious and circumstantial convictions. If ambivalent uncertainty is intolerable, these disoriented absolutists find ways to resist acknowledging the presence of such factors as preference, comfort, and self-interest, in their justifications of conviction. The language

existing to carry the intentions of expression, it remains intertwined with the self and circumstance. This awareness changes the orientation of the meaning of utterances: from logical discussion, for instance, to strategic invention.

Armstrong emphasises the alienated state of metaphorical language due to this fractured particularity, and its consequent state of contention with the reality it seeks to claim power over. However, while the possibility that compelling general assurances will emerge from particular instances of metaphoric truth dissolves, the resilience of the habit offers a compelling case for a mode of evaluation other than its logical or literal credibility. (This credibility, though, is the implicit standard required by the type of rationalisations in which its devotees clothe the absolute rightness of their devotion, and, therefore, is implicit also in the nature of the assurance and certainty they intend these rationalised authorities to provide). With an awareness of the intended authority of an utterance and the circumstance in which this intention and the act are founded, the propriety of a different approach to the role of such convictions is evident. Furthermore, through this simultaneous awareness of construction and constructor, the profile of the intended meaning and the motivations which determine this intention often become apparent: an individual or circumstantial need requires support, and in the nature of the crutch the essential nature of the need is reflected. In the transition between secular and divine foundations for the role of abstract notions of truth and morality these crutches become unnecessary and cumbersome

of abstract objectivity and pseudo-scientific ideology takes up the strain and offers the semblance of rational proofs of new foundations and certainties to their merely rationalised convictions. The inadmissible confusion is effaced superficially, but the meanings given to “rational” terms remain latently charged with the uncertainty they repress; for this reason, individuals who utilise these terms are often compelled to adopt more adamant postures of conviction than might be naturally appropriate were these terms actual givens, not merely contestable rationalisations. The overt language of conviction is a self-solacing code, which plays on the belief in the co-existence of two types of knowledge, circumstantial truths and unchanging abstract truths. This distinction suggests a religious hang-over and becomes a source of quixotic approaches to human ideology and convictions.

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Responding to his nephew’s depiction of Dipsychus’ temptations (in the “Epilogue”³²), the poet’s uncle alludes to a type of moral indoctrination, through which the generation represented by the poet (and Dipsychus) have been forged in disharmony with the world and their prospective roles in it.

... as for my own nephews, they seem to me a sort of hobbadihoy cherub, too big to be innocent, and too simple for anything else. – They’re full of the notion of the world being so wicked, and of their taking a higher line, as they call it. I only fear they’ll never take any at all.” – What is the true purpose of education? Simply to make plain to the young understanding the laws of the life they will have to enter.

(Epilogue, 46-52).

Through the course of their education these nephews have been put through “a course of confirmation and sacraments backed up with sermons and private admonitions, and what is much the same as auricular confession” (63-65). They emerge then with such a strong personal affiliation to the directives of a higher line, and such a sense of the transcendent dignity attained in observing it, that they seem disqualified from their “country’s service” in pragmatic capacities (39). Worldly duty is superfluous to their

appendages, sought out to gratify a retrograde impression as to the paramount value of an order founded on external absolutes.

observation of the higher line, and they are superfluous to a community they deem merely circumstantial, which they nevertheless exist within. Being expatriates allows them, even if temporarily, to evade the scene in which intimations of their negligence pollute the dignity of their abstract devotions. Alternatively, where funds are needed, as in Dipsychus' situation, or where protean projects seem feasible, the affiliation with the higher line can be played out in action which appears ideologically justified.

Where they cannot consolidate an authority to shelter them from accountability for their uncertain moral acts, these hobbadihoy youths feel compelled to guard their conscience by remaining aloof from the threat of error or corruption which is unavoidable in any practical employment. Both *Amours* and *Dipsychus* contain signposts which direct their relevance outwards from the representation of what is solely individual to Claude and Dipsychus (and *The Spirit* which is really an extension of the same entity) to the atmosphere from which these individuals emerged. Clough thereby suggests that there is something typical in both Claude and Dipsychus. They are not archetypes, they are not generic forms, and neither are they symbols or emblems, they remain individuals and like all individuals they are unique. However, they reflect characteristic traits of a peer group implied by the problems which confront them, and by the cultural tools (or lack thereof) which are available to combat these. As such, while existing outside convention, they are not intrinsically outsiders (neither sociopathic nor natural hermits), but earnest individuals unable to locate a satisfactory place "in" society. In his gestures to their peers, Clough implies a broader pattern of which Dipsychus and Claude are each, in their particular way, examples. Both have seemed slightly removed and aloof; through these signals of a loose community, though, Clough counter-acts this impression and allows its implications to maintain their complexity. It is an assurance, in fact, of the normality of their alienation, not as a mean of society but as a natural part of its leaven regardless. The characters themselves project a sense of their own isolation and a belief in their unique distinction in being so plagued, but this also relates to the exaggerated sensibility of the unworldly self.

*So go forth to the world, to the good report and the evil
Go, little book! thy tale, is it not evil and good?
Go, and if strangers revile, pass quietly by without answer.*

³² In the Epilogue of the poem, the poet (who has just read out the dialogue involving Dipsychus and *The Spirit*) and his uncle (the audience) discuss some of the themes of the poem and the questions they feel it raises.

Go, and if curious friends ask of thy rearing and age,
Say, I am flitting around from brain unto brain of
Feeble and restless youths born to inglorious days,
(*Amours*, V.217-22).

The foundations of Clough's sceptical equanimity, and his humour, are gradually developed through an anatomy of the habits of conviction. Clough's "anatomy" accepts the element of truth in both Dipsychus' and The Spirit's arguments but questions their attempts (through the consequences the attempts invite) to forge these truths into authoritative doctrine, with an unimpeachable mandate to govern moral conventions.

In Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* (1857) a similarly ambiguous moral environment forms the backdrop against which an inability to admit to a lack of confidence, the denial of ambiguity, represents the greatest vulnerability to manipulative exploitation. Similarly, the negation of Dipsychus' emotive convictions succeeds through his gradual acquiescence to The Spirit's false deification of Necessity. But the method of this emotive conversion can't avoid "re-enacting" the shape of devotion, wherein "I must" becomes an ennobling act of continued deference to a higher line, while spelling the end for what now seems Dipsychus' merely solipsistic indulgence in abstract criticism of reality.

In contrast to the higher discourse in which Dipsychus imagines his terminology participates, The Spirit teases out the contingencies and emotional strategies on which his faith maintains its semblance of external authority.

Whatever happen, don't I see you still
Living no life at all[?] Even as now
An o'ergrown baby, sucking at the dugs
Of Instinct, dry long since. Come come you are old enough
For spoon meat surely.

(*Dipsychus*, 2.5.177-81).

Dipsychus is a dreamer, he is a lover of abstraction and of a worldview which appears fancifully incompatible with actual fact. In opposition to this dreaminess The Spirit holds forth throughout the poem as an advocate for the propriety of "waking up", and acknowledging and interacting with the actualities of the world. In "The Intellectual

Physiognomy in Characterization”³³ – essentially a polemic on the propriety of active commitment as opposed to purely abstract theoretical engagement with the world (or rather an impression of it) – Georg Lukács conducts his argument under the banner of a quote from Heraclitus: “Awake, men have a common world, but each sleeper reverts to his own private world”.³⁴ The “common world” is a strategic image advocating ideological commitment; the enthusiastic use of this image by proponents of commitment, including *The Spirit*, is as intolerant of the common world’s profound ambiguity as are the dreams of the sleeper. Here “the common world” is simply a stylised counterpoint to the solipsism of the dreamer. What we see so clearly in Clough’s work, though, is that awaking to the nature of the common world is as likely to stifle commitment as to expedite it. The standards against which terms of conviction are judged remain those inherited from absolute devotion to divine authority, and in relation to these the individual “awake” to the ambiguities of the secular scene finds no credible justification to commit, idealistically, to it.

The *Spirit* identifies Dipsychus as a biblical Don Quixote (1.3.135); his reality is informed and defined, it would seem, by Biblical formulae, “A chivalry of chasteness” (1.3.136), in a similar way that Don Quixote’s is informed by the chivalric formulae of courtly romance. The symbols which Dipsychus recognises as the appropriate tools of representing and discussing reality are drawn from the emotionally approved foundations of Biblical morality and ideology. Reality in both cases is overlaid by fantastic impressions, to which each character pledges their allegiance in preference to an inherently disappointing reality.

Don Quixote transposed a past or merely mythical code of honour onto a present in which he can recognise no worthy equivalent; in response to a sense of disorienting deprivation, Dipsychus’ quixotism enacts a similarly nostalgic stylisation of reality. Each characters’ leading idea, the form of their quixoticism, contains a latent protest against the endemic dilemmas engendered by the impotent desire to find clear patterns of authority in the here and now (which is always flexible and multiform regardless of the relative potency of the explanations that order it or otherwise).

Refusing to stand up for his “honour” against the rude challenge of a Croatian guard, Dipsychus acknowledges the possibility:

³³ Georg Lukács, “The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization”, *Writer and Critic*, trans. Professor Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 149-88.

³⁴ Lukács, “The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization”, 149.

that the holy doctrine of our faith
In too exclusive fervency possessed
My heart with feelings, with ideas my brain[.]
(1.6.195-97).

This admission is rather whimsically incorporated into Dipsychus' relieved justification of the 'honourable' course of Christian humility and forgiveness. Under pressure, Dipsychus is not above the strategic manipulation of his relationship to his authority. The imperative in Dipsychus' relationship with the actual world becomes the organisation or manipulation of feelings and facts into patterns that allow his emotionally and intellectually approved ideal to seem feasible or true.

Those who depend on systems (as with Dipsychus' quixotic relationship with the 'facts' of religion), love the system *as a world* not as a means of understanding the world (systematising its curious confusion). It is a mediating device - between the self and the world the system is erected - which informs desire initially, then becomes an extension of it. The self desires the system it has grown into, *over* the reality it is supposed to order. But this promotes a state of schism with reality that *tells* (madness, doubt, alienation) against the preference of the self and the system. The discomfort of this telling schism can challenge the manipulations of desire, and force the individual to recognise the determining force of their denials as well as their wants.

And I half yielded! O unthinking I!
O weak weak fool! O God how quietly
Out of our better into our worst selves
Out of a true world which our reason knew
Into a false world which our fancy makes
We pass and never know - O weak weak fool.
(1.3.4-9).

In a grand gesture to his own autonomy, Clough's Cain (in *Adam and Eve*) accepts his destructive impulse, and the consequences of his acting on it (a radically altered world), as his personal responsibility. Dipsychus, by contrast, generalises; he decrees his temptation a common affliction, which it may well be, but his intention is rather to exonerate his temptation (for his own sake and to protect his ideal) than to explain the origins of his moral dilemma. The weakness or inadequacy revealed in this contrast

reflects Dipsychus' imperative need to orientate his moral angst to a framework of stable external categories. His need to ensure the comfortable delusion of a realisable template of external accountability forces an experience of uncertain moral boundaries and dilemma into a histrionic act of self-reprobation. The attempts of both Dipsychus and Claude to announce moral certainties frequently strike this awkward tone of compensatory overstatement. On deployment they discover their inadequacy in the element of uncertainty which they aim to orchestrate. Like the Underground Man, who worries over the laughable bookishness of any attempt to demonstrate and defend a *point d'honneur* to an urban, modern audience, Claude's and Dipsychus' expostulations of conviction seem to strike them as anachronistic and affected.³⁵

Dipsychus takes pride in the fact that the pleasure he feels in the presence of life and the world's beauty is "sincere and unmingled" (1.5.50). He believes that the purity of specular detachment is propriety. The impulse to mingle with life, therefore, is logically decreed improper. Nevertheless, this impulse is spontaneous and potent; religious logic can tell Dipsychus to resist, but it cannot curtail the force he is resisting.

Better it were, thou sayest, to consent,
Feast while we may, and live ere life be spent;
Close up clear eyes, and call the unstable sure
The unlovely lovely and the filthy pure,
In self belyings self deceivings roll
And lose in Action, Passion, Talk the soul.

Ah better far to mark off so much air
And call it heaven, place bliss and glory there
Fix perfect homes in the unsubstantial sky
And say what is not shall be by and by
What here exists not, must exist elsewhere.
Play then not tricks upon thyself, O man;
Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can.
(1.5.63-75).

Dipsychus decries the acceptance of human limitation as a prematurely grasped at convenience. To consent to life, he implies, we must deceive ourselves and constrict what he considers our noblest desires and tendencies to an arbitrary and irresponsibly

³⁵ The Underground Man complains that "among us to this day it is impossible to speak of a point of honor – that is, not honor, but a point of honor (*point d'honneur*) – otherwise than in literary language. In ordinary language there is no mention of a 'point of honor' " (*Notes from Underground*, 50). I shall return to this complaint later.

flimsy conception of some future state. These, he seems to imply, are the tricks that people play on themselves at the behest of appetites which, in calling us to “feast while we may”, are robust advocates for a healthy irreverence towards the dictates of absolute Truth. Nevertheless, this is an irreverence which Dipsychus does not share. Dipsychus’ concern that fact should be recognised as fact is generated not only by his esteem for pure and absolute dictates. Dipsychus feels (or fears) that people who have consented in the manner he describes have gratuitously limited their lives; their closed up eyes preclude life from becoming “the thing it can”. As ever, Dipsychus lauds the nature of his abstract aspirations in the vaguest of terms; his intention to insulate himself against the compromising demands of worldly commitment is nevertheless clear. In light of Dipsychus’ championing of abstinence his anger with himself at having nearly “fallen” (throughout 1.3) might well reflect a straightforward concern for his threatened soul. In his immediate response, though, it is apparent that his disappointment was due not only to his inability firmly to hold back but also to his ultimate inability to go forward. Dipsychus’ policy of abstinence plays a part in a casuistic proliferation of principles and beliefs which reflexively validate his unworldly state (which, though effectively static, is fraught with counter-acting tides, ideas and impulses).

Alone on the Plain?

Solipsism suggests the formulation of or recourse to a personal, proudly subjective lexicon, which is obscure and misleading beyond the interior confines of its origin. Dipsychus defines the world to himself, as does Claude, but both do so from within a rootless subjectivity, generating a relationship to reality which demands external expression but can only hope for approval from like minds. Claude deems himself an Adam: he names the world, but is troubled nevertheless by the absence of a help-meet. He feels there is no-one to share the meaning he makes of the world, and temper or activate it with their understanding (no-one, that is, except Eustace, to whom Claude unconsciously turns for this interaction).

Here in the Garden I walk, can freely concede to the Maker
That the works of his hand are all very good: his creatures,
Beast of the field and fowl, he brings them before me;

I name them;
 That which I name them, they are, - the bird, the beast,
 and the cattle.
 But for Adam, - alas, poor critical coxcomb Adam!
 But for Adam there is not found an help-meet for him.
 (*Amours*, I.vii.146-51).

Similarly unable to recognise any means of anchoring his ideals outside himself, Dipsychus grudgingly identifies his own help-meet as “th’hard naked world” (2.6.77). “Adam accept thy Eve” (2.6.78), he tells himself, but it is The Spirit’s camouflaged ideology of pragmatic materialism which he accepts, under the misapprehension of its disinterested veracity. In trying to remain idealistically pure and to postpone their “fall” into compromised worldliness, each risks sentencing himself to a lonely and anxious state of proud isolation and repressed longing. The self-contained understanding and approval of the solipsistic idealist, appear here in a telling juxtaposition with a social or romantic ineptitude. The unlikelihood of establishing conventional domestic ties (a “comfortable home”) reflects the isolating effect of solipsists’ dependence on their own version of their role and ideal conduct in the world.

Initially, youthful idealists like Claude have no reason or need to approve received ideas. Frequently, abstract idealists are defiantly, and symptomatically, independent, avoiding the responsibilities implicit in involvement with other people in order not to compromise the feelings of control and competence which their solipsisms afford them.³⁶ To maintain the ideals of conduct they have enshrined at the centre of their self-esteem, they are often forced (or feel duty-bound) to maintain this independence

Claude attempts to assure himself (or is perhaps appealing to Eustace for assurance) that his rationale of dutiful, not just preferential, detachment is valid. To

³⁶ The “symptomatic” kind of independence, which often underlies overtly defiant rationalisations, is apparent in the failure of Claude’s courtship; it is perhaps best exemplified, though, by a revealing anecdote told by the narrator of *Wuthering Heights*. This character, a refined, solitary gentleman, confides that his mother, “used to say I should never have a comfortable home”, and relates an episode in which he considers he had “proved [him]self perfectly unworthy of one” (*Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 47-48). The episode in question involves the narrator’s infatuation with a young lady at the seaside, “a real goddess, in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me” (48). The narrator never confessed his love but assures us that in his looks the “merest idiot” could not have failed to perceive his condition. The lady in question responds in kind, she “looks” her understanding. Confronted by the prospect of actual involvement beyond his original distanced infatuation, the narrator confesses that he “shrunk icily into [him]self, like a snail, at every glance retired colder and farther” (48). Confused by the narrator’s unusual procession from a successful advance to an unequivocal retreat, the young lady decamps with her mother. Nothing is left for the narrator but to muse over “this curious turn of disposition” by which he has “gained the reputation of deliberate heartlessness” (48). The inappropriateness of this reputation, he further confides, is a fact of which he alone is aware.

starve for his own ideal might conceivably be construed as a noble act, but to inflict the deliberate unworldliness of his idealism on others, a wife or children, would force the self-sustaining ego-centrism of his “unauthorised” idealism into direct conflict with concrete worldly responsibilities. To Claude, independence and solitude come to seem necessities of his vocation as an idealist. His jocular but genuine salute to the “Most meritorious subject, the childless and bachelor uncle” (Lix.185) reflects a wry recognition of the condition most amenable to his idealistic affinities. Nevertheless, this “amenable” condition is not an entirely chosen or desired fate; Claude’s devotion to abstraction is revived, for instance, as a consoling posture in the aftermath of his failed romance.³⁷

In *Amours*, Claude’s failure to conventionally validate any explicit moral framework is ultimately of secondary significance to the impulse for communication or utterance out of which it is formed. When one imagines the poem as a diary or journal the importance of supplication, inherent in the epistolary form, becomes clear. Claude’s semi-performance of love is neither wholly factitious nor wholly true, the semi-performance of his letters to Eustace is similarly neither thoroughly candid nor formally opaque. Within their tentative and self-conscious mixture of adventurous speculation and precise criticism, it becomes apparent that the forms of certainty which Claude most strongly desires or intellectually esteems, can only attain the kind of absolute credibility he longs for through his indulgence of expressive acts of self-persuasion. In the very flexibility of such acts, the indirect expression of the challenges they aim to silence remains constant. This is the case in *Notes from Underground* and *The Meek Girl*, and Turgenev’s *Superfluous Man* (in “The Diary of a Superfluous Man”), the instinctive recourse of these variously desperate individuals to the platform of secular confession points the way of the search for a meaningful utterance. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*,³⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre presents Nietzsche’s espousal of his philosophical and philological claims against language’s capacity for meaning as its own repudiation. The apparent failures of

³⁷ The merit Claude grants to such figures is playfully backed up with a commendation of their inherent accordance with Malthusian doctrine of population control (Lix.185). Claude’s partisan approval and identification with and approval of the virtues of this position, invite the qualifying retort that the limited involvement of the childless bachelor uncle nurtures a child’s lack of responsibility and obligations while claiming the rights to independent self-reliance of the mature adult.

³⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

expression in Claude's letters exist in a similar context of supplication to flesh and blood, and devotion to the process of making sense.

Expression for Claude becomes a test of the possibility of relating to perception as knowledge. Perception is interpretative and personal while knowledge, for Claude, constitutes or "relates to" a fund of absolute certainties. Claude's admissions of his fear of being moved, are fears rather of being moved by contingent and subjective stimuli, "Some malpractice of heart and illegitimate process" (II.xi.272), as opposed to being directed by the manifestations of an external law.

Waiting, and watching, and looking! Let love be its own
inspiration!
Shall not a voice, if a voice there must be, from the airs
that environ,
Yea, from the conscious heavens, without our knowledge
or effort,
Break into audible words? And love be its own
inspiration?

(II.xii.278-81).

Claude's defence of his emotional scepticism, like his spiritual scepticism, is more than a simple cynical resistance to the ephemeral enthusiasms which the poem repeatedly discovers in a variety of initially plausible roles. Claude is yearning to be moved, but he is equally determined to keep his fingers off the scale of inspiration, and thereby assure himself that any movement might suggest a pure external direction. Claude's suspicion of the foundations both of his own "convictions" and of social and moral convention allows Clough to allude to the likelihood that any unequivocal ideal or certainty will be based in either ignorance, delusion, or mere assertion. Claude's unwillingness to accept these readymade certainties is teased and tempted by the urgency of his desire for the true assurance that ostensibly they offer. And yet, alongside the substance of this frustration we have Claude's letters to Eustace, in which the consolation of community and the consolation of bearing witness allow for the gentle humility and self-deprecation which dignifies rather than dismisses Claude's frustration. In the isolation of his prayer-like unsent letters this dignity persists in the ideal of another's sympathetic scrutiny and understanding. Claude benefits from a relationship to himself and his own strategies which allows for honesty and proportion enough to deny his weaknesses the indulgence of rationalisation and approval, without

condemning himself for being weak. This resembles the suggestion, implicit in Clough's work, of a disillusion with the hierarchies of knowledge and special competence implied by revelatory rites of passage. It is in deference to this "faith" that such rationalisations typically proceed.

The tenor of Claude's utterances alerts the reader, and Claude equally, to breaches being denied, prejudices justified and malpractices of attribution and understanding being verified as truth. In the combination of vanity and critical pride Claude inevitably acknowledges these flaws. Ignorance and hypocrisy are the recognisable negative images of his ideal; Claude's only real point of contact with his ideal is in defying its travesties and impostors in the ideal's name, in spite of the discomfort and social disruption this defiance engenders.

In spite of the frustration and helplessness that begin to creep into Claude's failing attempts to affirm a certainty, his persisting commitment to registering and examining his uncertainty begins to suggest a resilient posture of discovery and gradual re-orientation from the midst of confusion. Though his typically abortive resolutions, and the profile they bolster, remain ambiguous, and Claude remains uncertain, his relationship to uncertainty develops a tenacity which dispels any implications of inadequacy or failure that his initial orientation to abstract certainty might have invited.

Claude expresses himself to Eustace in a recognisable "dialect"³⁹ which appears at first to depend upon a set of conventions which, in a literal sense, prove unsound each time he tries to rest upon them. Approached as manifestations of an actual ideal of conduct, these conventions unravel. Of his love, for instance, he suggests: "After all perhaps there was something factitious about it; / I have had pain, it is true; have wept; and so have the actors" (V.viii.164-65). This cautiousness reasserts, or rediscovers (given that in his quest for Mary he had acted, though self-consciously, as if inspired), a previously expressed scepticism about the limited nature of any fruitful commitment or inspiration.

³⁹ In discussing the dialectic subtleties of Clough's poetry, in "The Radical In Crisis: Clough", particularly pages 178-88 of *Victorian Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1993), Isobel Armstrong makes a similar observation in relation to the interaction between the characters in *The Bothie*. In both cases the recognised solidarity of a particular class of discourse is typical of a recurring means of intellectual identification through "passwords" such as the use of Latin and Greek, or discussions at a certain level of abstraction. In Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* a similar shared origin is revealed between the captain of the *Sephora* and Leggatt by the tone of their conversation. Their like demeanour extends to a shared mode of training, and their mutual recognition of the terms of a particular moral code offers Leggatt the opportunity to explain his crime to a peer and feel himself understood.

Tell me, my friend, do you think that the grain would
 sprout in the furrow,
 Did it not truly accept as its *summum* and *ultimum bonum*
 That mere common and may-be indifferent soil it is set
 in?
 Would it have force to develop and open its young
 cotyledons,
 Could it compare, and reflect, and examine one thing
 with another?

(III.ii.40-44).

When Claude scrutinises the various tropes of knowledge and growth into which his desire for orientation gently leads him – the quest for self-knowledge, for love, ideological engagement; he even finds hints of affectation in the resignation his failed quests engender⁴⁰ – he finds in them precisely the sort of contingent, half-habitual and half-affected postures from which initially, as an isolated tourist, he felt he had escaped.⁴¹

In spite of his difficulties in discriminating and expressing any clear and certain conviction, and perhaps because of these difficulties, Claude still writes, demonstrating

⁴⁰ For example, in a frustrated and defeated mood Claude reflects on the ill-fatedness both of the Roman uprising, and his own identification with it:

Whither depart the souls of the brave that die in the
 battle,
 Die in the lost, lost fight, for the cause that perishes with
 them?
 ...
 Pining and haunting the grave of their by-gone hope and
 endeavour?
 All declamation, alas! Though I talk, I care not for
 Rome, nor
 Italy; feebly and faintly, but with the lips, can lament
 the
 Wreck of the Lombard youth and the victory of the
 oppressor.
 Whither depart the brave? – God knows; I certainly do
 not.

(V.vi.118-28).

Within his impulsive elegiac gestures to the crushed revolution Claude discovers vague sentimental tropes which had seduced and consoled him through the lyrical mystification of defeat and the invocation of a notion of fertile and dignifying sacrifice. The threadbare nature of these mere declamations, also betrays to him the mildness and insubstantiality of his initial engagement with the Republican cause.

⁴¹ As the developing political and social circumstances around Claude begin to challenge this independence, he is forced again to dissect, and often deflect, elements of social obligation in order to disclose and avoid the potential entrapments of merely factitious conventions. “One doesn’t die for good manners” (II.iv.69), he observes, but the whimsicality of his objections to mere good manners (itself an example of the lightness or good-form he adheres to out of a kind of delicacy, a sense of proportion and a stoic acceptance of his disquiet), is the public face of a belligerence towards unthinking conformity.

the tenacity of motivations analogous to those that might once have moulded these conventions. Even in dissolving the authority these conventions appear to claim, Claude's commitment to seeking clarity, even at the cost of what seems a gratuitous disorientation and confusion, demonstrates the vitality of the impulse to affirm a binding framework of conventions, abstracted from merely particular interests, which had temporarily manifested in them. Claude's sceptical persistence dissolves this dormant or implicit justification of observing the *status quo* allowing for what is a skin-shedding, rather than a negation, of anachronistically absolute conventions of abstract idealism.

Through the course of his tour, Claude's attempts to resolve his feelings of intellectual isolation from familiar frameworks of value and behaviour become essentially the manifestation of his desire for communication and clarity. In attempting to right the wrong which these feelings seem to register, though, their nature and origin are formulated and expressed as a normative condition unto itself (not merely as a deprivation). Claude's unsent letters still invoke a particular recipient but, in this abstraction of the *idea* of reception and in the prospect of sympathy which it highlights, discover a different sense of meaning or purposeful quest to express a cohesive idea (at the very least), and beyond that to be understood.⁴²

Claude's letters to Eustace half-consciously seek the consolation of solidarity; this consolation is problematic and is not openly sought or acknowledged partly out of an incomplete awareness of the need that prompts the seeking. This incomplete awareness seems due, furthermore, to an unwillingness to accept the potentially self-obscuring, diminishing or diffusing, implication of a dependence on an other to dispel the insubstantiality of the isolated consciousness (to give it clear concrete form). Claude seems to realise this in his somewhat compromised celebration of liberation from the *assujettissement* of being what one has been. Solidarity of expression, therefore, while providing the comfort of making sense to another, is also a confine. The discomfort Claude feels in the company of his uncle's circle suggests the negative manifestation of this segregation of affirming environments. Claude's letters to Eustace, in contrast, suggest the instinctive recourse to the approved and common language of a peer through

⁴² The epigram to *Lord Jim*, " 'It is certain my conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it.' – Novalis" (*Lord Jim* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1989), 41), infers the potency of a similar desire to be understood by another in the same light as that in which he wishes to understand himself.

which Claude can measure the sense he is making, as opposed to blithely vocalising a solipsism (or monologue).

But as men pray,
without asking
Whether One really exist to hear or do anything for
them, -
Simply impelled by the need of the moment to turn to
a Being
In a conception of whom there is freedom from all
limitation, -
So in your image I turn to an *ens rationis* of friendship.
Even so write in your name I know not to whom nor in
what wise.

(V.v.71-76).

Claude's *ens rationis* of friendship, wherein the affirmation of an understanding listener is presumed free of the potentially disruptive actuality of the friend, is likened to prayer. It is a particular type of prayer, though, which implies no actual article of faith (and therefore no controversies beyond accepted difference within a commitment to discussion). This non-denominational expression is not a vehicle for signalling faith or allegiance to something beyond it, but the effect of a resilient impulse to use moral language; an impulse which is both supplication and its own reward whether its subject be doubt, confusion, wonder, hope or engagement. To judge these expressions in terms of the particular ends they frequently propose for themselves is to accept their own exaggeration of one proposition (the *true* goal) out of all proportion with the others that give it context, and to forget the tentative preconditions from which it follows. Claude's impulse towards communication (his writing) and to the *ens rationis* of friendship both propose a faith in the redeeming possibility of a human relationship similar to the *ens rationis* of divine authority in which "true faith" comports itself.

Secular Sharing

It is often the effects of the secret counsel with the secret self (necessary to maintain inhibiting and alienating ideals and principles in the midst of social conventions that

“betray” the limited credibility of their ideals), which are the source of the trauma and dysfunction of double mindedness, rather than the double mindedness itself.

At the start of *Dipsychus*, Dipsychus dejectedly finds himself guilty of being a “poor fool / Still nesting on thyself” (1.1.5-6). Dipsychus’ fixation on the workings of his own self-conception and worldview and their relationship to the common world is driven by his inability to reconcile his feeling of an imperative obligation to seek the Ideal with his experience of the obligations valued in everyday life. The rigour is self-imposed, it is an aspiration towards standards of propriety which Dipsychus believes are necessary to potential recipients of these ideal satisfactions. But these are abstract and conceptual values, they are metaphysical; symbolic. Dipsychus’ emotional affinity with the narrative in which these abstractions are more than mere symbols necessitates his detachment from ambivalent reality and his recourse to a solipsistic idealism.

Dipsychus’ literal isolation in Venice is mirrored in his feelings of moral isolation within the secular materialism he associates with the world of base fact. He is uncertain of his capacity to uphold the ideal standards he has set for himself and more significantly of the absolute propriety of doing so. The Spirit’s role in turning this position of anxious supplication into a willing self-abnegation can be clarified somewhat by considering a depiction, in Joseph Conrad’s short story “The Secret Sharer”, of the reinforcement of an isolated esoteric moral code.⁴³ This parallel will help to draw out some of the problems engendered by the isolation of absolute idealists from satisfying rituals of moral support or acceptable self-checking.

Dipsychus, a “mawkish meditative stranger” (1.1.60), longs to hear himself echoed and approved and to feel his strangeness verified as the prestigious mark of enlightenment and perspicacity. Dipsychus confronts the world in a state of conflicted certainty and isolation, his commitment to his ideals is still a matter of preference but he can find no way to galvanise it into an externally credible moral position.

Both Dipsychus and the narrator of “The Secret Sharer” are struggling with their dawning recognitions of a personal responsibility to apply their respective idealised codes of conduct to the actual circumstances of their existence; to translate what have

⁴³ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*, ed. Daniel Schwarz (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1997). *The Secret Sharer* has given rise to an array of critical interpretations (a sample of which is provided in the edition I have cited). It is not my intention to dispute or qualify what Conrad’s story has been taken to mean, but merely to emphasise particular aspects which help to clarify an important aspect of the kind of moral disorientation and idealistic contest with reality depicted in Clough’s *Dipsychus*.

been cloistered or theoretical affiliations into applicable templates of interaction with reality. Conrad's narrator notes at the outset:

... what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. ... I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.⁴⁴

With a common background and consequently a common commitment to the disinterested ideals of the officer class, the narrator and Leggatt "understand" one another and mutually approve Leggatt's misadventure as an example of the kind of morally ambiguous consequences of his duty to the higher imperative of saving the ship.⁴⁵ The misadventure comes under the authority of an abstract code which is necessary to guide and support individuals who are required to act in the role of an authority for others. The narrator's sympathetic understanding provides emotional support and external reaffirmation for this example of the morally controversial decisions and actions which abstract codes of duty, such as that shared by himself and Leggatt, occasionally demand of their devotees.⁴⁶ In its dependence on the underlying

⁴⁴ *The Secret Sharer*, 26.

⁴⁵ Leggatt has been involved in the death of a crew member during a storm and in the course of his attempts to, in his opinion, save the ship by hoisting a particular sail. He has escaped incarceration on his own ship and, resting in the water beside the narrator's vessel, is taken on board where he explains his predicament. The narrator receives Leggatt in a state of longing for positive reinforcement of an ideal self-conception (preconceived by him as the form which self-knowledge will affirm as his essential character) that has come to seem somehow dubious and unsettled.

From their first exchanges, and despite its highly abnormal circumstance, the captain's interaction and affinity with Leggatt proceeds as if nothing could be more normal: the two both attended the same Officer training ship, the *Conway*, and Leggatt's appeals are made "as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes" (*The Secret Sharer*, 31). The captain's sense of his strangeness to his crew, and his more complex responsibilities – "I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks" (26) – expedites a further bond with Leggatt: of the second mate, for instance, the narrator confides to Leggatt, "I don't know much more of the fellow than you" (37). The captain embraces Leggatt in this kind of assertion of mutuality, an embrace that responds to an immediate affinity with Leggatt's ruling class language and mode of speech. "I say", "Look here, my man", "By Jove!"; his voice, furthermore, is "calm and resolute. A good voice" (30). Leggatt's self-possession induces a "corresponding state" in the narrator, who seems to have registered the signs of a peer and ally straight away. The rapport is strong enough that on learning the reason behind Leggatt's appearance, "I've killed a man" (31), the narrator's foremost concern is to proffer an excuse on Leggatt's behalf – "Fit of temper" (31) – and thereby declare his allegiance. Leggatt has already qualified his confession by suggesting that his victim was not strictly speaking a "man" anyway, certainly not a man as he and his new friend understand it. The narrator approves Leggatt's callous elitism reflecting silently on the "bless my soul – you don't say so" type of intellect" (31) of his "absurd" mate. Leggatt then cements the captain's complicity, asserting a sympathy based in a well-founded presumption of shared experiences and opinions, "But what's the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur" (31).

⁴⁶ It is possible that Leggatt, with his *Conway* trained esteem of vocational duty, represents the human arm of pragmatic necessities which transcend personalised moral responsibility. Leggatt fulfils a duty to

rapport granted by their shared moral code, and sustained through their secret counsel, the relationship between Leggatt and the captain suggests conditions under which self-justification and confession can seem to objectively validate subjective beliefs or moral conduct.⁴⁷

“As long as I know that you understand,” he whispered. “But of course you do. It’s a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose.” And in the same whisper, as if we two whenever we talked had to say things to each other which were not fit for the world to hear, he added, “It’s very wonderful.”⁴⁸

The shared moral code between the narrator and Leggatt (affording the kind of communion which Dostoevsky’s pawnbroker seeks, unsuccessfully, to manufacture by force in *The Meek Girl*), provides each with an outlet through which tendencies that might isolate them from, or turn them against, common reality, are contextualised as a particular kind of service to it. By finding someone who understands and approves his moral position, Leggatt is able to accept the fate (of innocent exile) imposed on him by the majority’s condemnation of his ambiguous position.

For Clough’s generation Latin was necessary for a professional career, it was important to medicine, law and the clergy. At the same time both Latin and Greek were signs of a privileged education, and served both as a line of cultural demarcation and a sign of common and complicit interest (similar to the shared training from the Officer ship *The Conway* which binds two members of a duty elite in Conrad’s “The Secret Sharer”). A similar function of demarcation and identification is still apparent in Virginia Woolf’s depiction, in *Jacob’s Room*, of the abstraction from “real life” of a young educated elite in the early twentieth-century: “A learned man is the most venerable of all - a man like Huxtable of Trinity, who writes all his letters in Greek”, muses Cambridge graduate

the ship and its crew while sacrificing the crew member and, effectively, himself. The common bond between Leggatt and the narrator, their mutual Conway training, suggests both the isolation of an elite and the mutual recognition of a code of dutiful efficiency. The narrator’s minority allegiance with Leggatt might represent either the bias of familiarity (in the company of his crew he feels a “stranger”) or the enlightened moral consciousness of a privileged class exempt from popular moral confines.

⁴⁷ As such this shared and affirmed “knowledge” becomes the emotional ballast which reassures him of the moral acceptability of his actions, in contrast to the condemnatory judgements which pursue him as a kind of unthinking urge for simple justice (and with an implied hint of lower class resentment and vengefulness against moral “liberties” taken by the ruling class).

⁴⁸ Conrad, *The Secret Sharer*, 52.

Jacob Flanders in *Jacob's Room*.⁴⁹ “Boastful, triumphant” (63), Jacob and his friend walk the streets of London quoting Sophocles and Aeschylus to one another (though the narration implies that each listens solely to himself). “ ‘Probably,’ said Jacob, ‘we are the only people in the world who know what the Greeks meant’ ” (64). Isolation and insight are eagerly and uncritically conflated in a self-confirming insularity and elitism. By implication, this kind of privilege suggests grounds for discounting those who don’t recognise the relevant “passwords”, and defusing the obligation to give them equal consideration as moral beings. More importantly, in relation to *Dipsychus*, the loss of a divine authority results in the fragmentation of a community that might once have supported Dipsychus’ unworldly appeals against worldly commitment. Without a divine authority or the guidance of absolute law, individuals who devote themselves to abstract quests for meaning and moral conduct are liable, through their openness to manipulation and self-delusion, to surrender themselves to merely finite images of absolute authority. For it is only from representatives of these factitious authorities that they will receive anything like the kind of absolute reinforcement for which they long.

The Spirit disputes the terms of Dipsychus’ fidelity to an idealism based in Christian principles, but at the same time it encourages the habits of absolutism which underlie this fidelity, in order to facilitate his dutiful submission to worldly necessity. Dipsychus’ thwarted attempt to rediscover the authority of his Christian ideals – The Spirit, he seems to presume, will be forced to fall silent once he addresses it directly, and his convictions will have been revived by their triumph – engenders the ultimate collapse of his cherished affinities.

I have scarce spoken yet to this strange follower
Whom I picked up, ye great gods, tell me where!
And when! for I remember such, long years
And yet he seems new come.

(2.2.28-31).

⁴⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1992), 93. While something akin to an early-twentieth-century counterpart to *The Bothie*, *Jacob's Room* is somewhat more direct in its characterisation of the status of “intellectual” discourse. Mrs. Papworth, who “did for Mr. Bonamy in New Square ... held the plates under water and then dealt them on the pile beneath the hissing gas, she listened: heard Sanders speaking in a loud rather overbearing tone of voice: ‘good’ he said, and ‘absolute’ and ‘justice’ and ‘punishment,’ and ‘the will of the majority.’ ” (*Jacob's Room*, 87-88). Overheard, these become alien fragments rather than words with meaning, the quotation marks suggest strange (and privileged) symbols; the components of a language differentiated, overtly and simplistically, from that of the useful parlance of domestic help. Mrs. Papworth’s eavesdropping ends with her intervening as the two young gentlemen conclude their abstract debate by further trying one another out

The predictably reaffirming circuit of shared or commonly accepted terms which Dipsychus expects will support his beliefs and moral position, is relentlessly inverted and undermined by The Spirit; it takes Dipsychus' "higher line" and annotates and anecdotalises it, belittling the scope and provenance of Dipsychus' idealism.⁵⁰ Dipsychus similarly employs the imagery of productivity and dutiful service to justify his preference for a prolonged unworldliness as a disinterested spiritual duty.

Long before The Spirit's voice is registered (as opposed to indirectly addressed) by Dipsychus, it appears plainly to the reader as an irreverent counterpoint and comic deflation of Dipsychus' "higher line". In the first scene, for example, The Spirit parenthetically insinuates a background of alternative responses in the context of which Dipsychus' utterances are characterised from the outset as contestable. The persuasiveness of this challenge is extended by the interaction between The Spirit's and Dipsychus' tone. Alongside the levity of The Spirit's polarising banter, the contrasting tones of Dipsychus' utterances (betraying a melodramatic melancholy combined with the solipsist's belief in a universal accord for their own insight and understanding), are those of exaggerated declamation. Dipsychus' standards of evaluation remain abstract and general and can only render the actual world, therefore, as an inadequate and negative landscape. For Dipsychus, like Claude, the idealised allegiance to the realm of ideas effects an awkwardness in negotiations with the particular and with "normal" people. Dipsychus' sense of kinship with the abstracted world of universal concepts reflects his esteem for what is essentially a jargon with which he can sustain a belief in the moral sovereignty of idealistic individualism, and in which he can also denigrate and dismiss any obligation to accept the "diminishment" which he equates with any idealisation of materialistic imperatives. The Spirit in turn forces Dipsychus to accept such obligations as more universally true than his jargon. The Spirit fuses the terms of

in a wrestling match. Phillip's activism seems undertaken in a similar spirit and with a similar intended audience.

⁵⁰ A similar ritual of disenchantment, wherein a highly romantic, Byronic posture of unique individual inspiration is exposed as a dubiously hollow role, is apparent in Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. In Tatyana's discovery, in Eugene's library, of the sources from which Eugene has assembled the pastiche of his character, Pushkin invites the reader to see Eugene as, at best, something of a sponge (unable to generate any character of his own, and absorbing it from estimable sources), and, at worst, as a hollow phoney. In Dipsychus' case, it is rather because he aspires to be so scrupulous about the veracity of his various beliefs and affinities that the uncertainties which The Spirit fans are able to unsettle him and so damagingly taint the articles of his faith. While his absolutism is legitimately challenged by the pragmatic quibbles which The Spirit exposes it to, his own personal intellectual and emotional approval need not be dissolved as dutifully, to his own mind, as they are.

allegedly exclusive terminologies, and utilises rather than disperses Dipsychus' sense of opposition between the universal and particular to commit him to the latter. From the point at which Dipsychus first registers the Spirit's "persecuting voice" (1.2.17) an overt diplomacy begins. Dipsychus' dialogue with The Spirit throughout Part 1 conducts an indirect contest of imagery and analogy; The Spirit moulds the close-up and particular to challenge Dipsychus' habitual recourse to grand spiritual distance. Dipsychus utilises a scenic vision to engage with that higher line which "sternly" will "sweep past our vanities" (1.2.56), and therein to activate and enact a relationship with abstraction which *resembles* his expectations of divinity.

Dipsychus' decision to "essay it now" (2.2.36) seems an instinctive gamble on a ritual of external approval: he lays out the equation in which his position seems both right and good with a desire, like Leggatt's, the pawnbroker's and Claude's, that the terms be recognised and the equation validated. The vulnerable isolation of Dipsychus' conviction involves him in this failed bid to see it affirmingly reflected back on him after projecting it onto The Spirit. "Come we'll be definite, explicit, plain. / I can resist, I know" (2.2. 40-41): confident in the potency of his arguments and anxious to vanquish The Spirit's dissent, Dipsychus stakes his certainty and signs his compact with the devil. In contrast, though, to the implicit understanding between Conrad's secret sharers, The Spirit acknowledges Dipsychus' terms only in order to ground its contradiction of their significance in the most compelling context. The desperate bravado of Dipsychus' resistance, "definite, explicit" and "plain", offers up his emotive authorities to a hostile force of particularising corrosion. Dipsychus' inability to communicate the knowledge on which he has based his self-esteem betrays both his illiteracy in the terms of social interaction and the limitations of his ironically idiosyncratic approval of and commitment to abstract qualities.

But should I form, a thing to be supposed,
A wish to bargain for your merchandise,
Say what were your demands; what were your terms[?]
What should I do, what should I cease to do?
(2.2.53-56).

Presuming himself well enough furnished with arguments and conviction to engage with and disperse The Spirit's temptations, Dipsychus undertakes this hypothetical

bargain. The abstract and theoretical discussion allows Dipsychus to indulge in a half-mocking posture of informed opposition to worldliness. This enables The Spirit, though, to directly address and amend Dipsychus' ideological stance and criticisms. It is a negotiation which Dipsychus enters into in what he considers a fittingly mock-serious tone, resorting immediately to the deliberate dry wit of an affected rakishness: "Religion goes, I take it" (2.2.59). By attempting to control the tone of his hypothetical engagement with The Spirit's arguments, Dipsychus betrays a desire to undermine potentially unsettling contentions. Dipsychus temporarily conducts himself in quite a changed manner, maintaining the proposition that he is engaging in a transaction from the position of strength. While he is briefly suspicious of The Spirit's eager congeniality Dipsychus' own desire to register the superiority of his claims betrays him: "I doubt about it; shall I do it? – Oh! Oh! / Shame on me, come" (2.2.49-50).

Having decided that silence signifies a weak unreadiness Dipsychus begins to assemble his own front of nonchalant resolve.

Scarce I know
If ever once directly I addressed him.
Let me essay it now: for I have strength.
(2.2.34-36).

His first direct address to The Spirit seeks to establish the disinterested indulgence he is extending to The Spirit: "Should I, my follower / Should I conceive, (not that at all I do, / 'Tis curiosity that prompts my speech)" (2.2.50-52). Dipsychus' new enthusiasm, "Which is to last, ye chances, say how long?" (2.2.43), allows him to see The Spirit as "an eaves-dropping menial" and to address it accordingly. Dipsychus dismisses The Spirit at the end of the scene, is succinct and decisive throughout, and jokes with the Spirit's propositions as it has joked with his. The lines of lackey and master are clearly drawn in Dipsychus' mind, but these roles are founded on the fatuous superiority of self-assertion, the fulcrum on which manipulative minions, cunning fools and confidence men in general can move mountains. The seduction thrives on The Spirit's expert manipulation of Dipsychus' brief flirtation with the posture of confidence and competent self-mastery. Dipsychus begins to bargain with The Spirit with the tone and deliberate explicitness of an affected worldliness. The willingness and capacity to bargain constitute credentials on which one of the talismanic rituals of vulgar (for a

conservative idealist like Dipsychus) capitalist materialism depends; a ritual which consecrates *savoir-faire* as a sublime state reflecting the virtues of pragmatic knowledge and appraisal.⁵¹ Dipsychus, though, is gulled by the simplest of salesman's confidence tricks which he essentially plays on himself (like Goethe's Faust, whose belief in his command over Mephistopheles blinds him to the reality of his role as a puppet for the spirit of negation).

But overall, the effect is of a series of propositions put, and a willingness to accept complicity unhappily established, "'Tis well, ill spirit. I admire your wit / As for your wisdom, I shall think of it" (2.2.124-5). The stealthy recognition of implied knowledge and the acquiescence to manipulation out of a desire for the reinforcement of internal desires and impulses generate the seductive partiality of secret sharing. In their role as tempter and manipulator the "followers" turn the perceived strength of the proud "superior" to their own ends.⁵²

Faust, when expressing his supposedly ambivalent concern over the obstacle presented by Philemon's and Baucis' home (he has an interest of course, but his motivation is not primarily one of malevolence towards the individuals), is certain of Mephistopheles' reinforcing approval. Mephistopheles' approval, though, is merely a means of furthering his own ends, as the spirit of negation, by flattering Faust's feeling of supreme competence.

The pimp's spruiking in Clough's "Easter Day II",⁵³ "*Eccellenza* sure must see, if he would choose" (ln.4), demonstrates a similar collaborative seduction (both parties at

⁵¹ Dostoevsky's archetype of the corrosive and self-erasing effects of individualistic materialism, Mr Golyadkin (in *The Double*), goes to great lengths to exhibit a similar kind of *savoir-faire*. Aside from driving out in a hired coach with his valet in costume livery, Golyadkin's imitations of the virtues and habits associated with the prestige of material wealth include a ritual visit to markets where he repeatedly bargains over trivial commodities, striking a pose of a man of financial ease and sagacity, but avoids any actual layout (he gloats, rather, over the fatness of his wallet, a routine that empowers him and reinvigorates his aspirations). Golyadkin's ritual suggests a self-solacing exercise, a kind of dry run, in the fundamental virtue of knowing the worth of things, and being able to bargain for whatever takes his fancy. It is a charade which requires other people, but which is essentially for his own benefit; Golyadkin is his own most avid observer, finding in his performances a pleasing image in which he finds himself a perfect fit in the role to which he feels his "character" entitles him. As he makes his false bargains it is as if he were trying out a disguise to see if anyone would spot him as a fraud and pretender. To prove to himself, that is, that he has the soul of an aristocrat and that his aspirations are the natural expression of a yearning for his proper social rank.

⁵² Referring, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), to the seductive allusiveness of Ivan Karamazov's discussion with Smerdyakov Mikhail Bakhtin describes the complexities implied in talking with a clever man, "who always avoids all direct words that might expose him, and with whom, therefore, 'it's always worthwhile speaking,' because it is possible to speak with him by hints alone" (258).

⁵³ Clough, "Easter Day II" (1865), *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 262-63.

some level want the same outcome) in an everyday utilisation of affirming echoes to induce or activate latent desire. In addressing the narrator of “Easter Day II” as “eccellenza” the flattery and purpose of the pimp keeping step is quite blatant. The instability that prompts Dipsychus’ attempted ritual of empowerment – wherein he speaks on behalf of the terms he has privileged and hopes to hear these terms approved and his uncertainties quashed by a sympathetic interlocutor – is more complex. In both, though, problematic desires (respectively, for sex and for absolute certainty) offer openings to seductive persuasions that attempt to induce the compromise of a personal ideal of good conduct. The Spirit’s manipulation, though, of Dipsychus’ desire to feel his ideals understood and approved follows a similar path of sly civility: his chivalric commitment to serve the highest truth (no matter how personally repellent) and his need for moral support are subverted by The Spirit’s rhetorical marriage of the certainty he desires with the otherwise abhorrent sham-virtues of convention.

The potency of auricular confession depends on a presumption of the shared values of confessor and confessed. Dipsychus’ self-communing registers this expectation; his hierarchy of terms delineates transcendent virtues and base corruptions, for instance, in an expectantly authoritative tone which seeks approval. Even his genuinely ambiguous representations of the dilemmas he is caught up in can be seen as invitations for an external validation of his favoured notions and, therein, the dispersal of the doubts that naturally attend them. To the genuine confusion which underlies Dipsychus’ attempts to validate conviction (particularly in Part 2) The Spirit applies a principle of order quite different to that which Dipsychus might have expected (particularly given his belief in the potency of abstract terms); nevertheless, he cannot resist the image and effect which The Spirit engineers in echoing particular aspects of his own confessional self-representation.

I commune with myself,
He speaks, I hear him, and resume to myself;
Whate’er I think, he adds his comments to;
Which yet not interrupts me.

(2.2.31-3).

To experience external approval, subjective testimonials have to find an interlocutor who shares or will entertain their fundamental prejudices. A satisfying secular confession (one in which one makes sense in the manner one had hoped to), involves a

supplication to and dependence on attaining the complicit involvement of the listener. On these grounds, Leggatt's confession (in *The Secret Sharer*) and the code of conduct it invokes are understood and approved. In contrast Dipsychus' "confession" is subverted by The Spirit in a way that demonstrates the vulnerability conceded in the appeal for affirmation (of one's moral conscience if not one's actions) which motivates secular confession and moral supplication.⁵⁴

The emotive environment is a scene ripe with comic cross-purpose. In "Clough's Poems of Self-Irony",⁵⁵ Masao Miyoshi suggests that the "intellect, wit, and irony, and an enormously attractive humour" which Clough had gained by the time he wrote *Dipsychus* are evident "most noticeably" in "the blood and bones of Mephisto".⁵⁶ For Miyoshi The Spirit's inexhaustible capacity to make light recommends him as the poem's comic source. But Dipsychus is not simply the butt of warranted ridicule, The Spirit's capacity to make light is founded in a corrosive cynicism which is neither all encompassing nor disinterested: it *strategically* deflates the abstract value systems which support Dipsychus' resistance to the claims, implicit in its idealisations of everyday necessity, of materialism and philistinism. The comedy of *Dipsychus* goes beyond the mockery of a tender-conscience's ideals, it is not a case of illusions stripped away by ridicule, but rather of an atmosphere in which the gap between individuals' desire for absolute certainties, and the selectivity of the terms and explanations these typically rest on, leaves would-be devotees eager to succumb to confidence tricks and unnecessary concessions. The vulnerability inherent in the determination of spiritually disinherited idealists to maintain a commitment to transcendent abstract values is apparent in Dipsychus' ultimately self-betraying negotiations over a worthy ideal. But the futility and pathos which underlie Dipsychus' gradual submission to worldliness are exacerbated by the cumulative implication that it is not his ideals that are obsolete but the relationship he demands they should fulfil.

⁵⁴ The "author" of Balzac's *Lily of the Valley*, for instance, is so eager to communicate his good opinion of himself to his lover through the account of what he considers an estimable and ennobling grand passion that he never considers the possibility that his account will receive anything but approval. The portrait of a constant and pure lover he imagines himself to be offering, is received as a vain and self-absorbed depiction of a man fascinated by his own feelings and too pompous to realise how this narcissism insults her. The author's lover returns his self-portrait with disdain, and casts him aside with a fastidious revulsion at his naïve egotism.

⁵⁵ Masao Miyoshi, "Clough's Poems of Self-Irony", *Studies in English Literature*, V (1965), 691-704.

⁵⁶ Miyoshi, "Clough's Poems of Self-Irony", 703.

Reasonable Arguments

Clough's characters share a state of confused dizziness in which their disjointed relation to what they perceive as the normal world is testified to by the awkward manner in which they interact with it.

In "On the Poetry of Wordsworth", Clough notes a frequent complaint made against Wordsworth's "mawkish" propensity for taking the simulated sentiment as the really real fact of the object, thereby eclipsing the objective form with the subjective formulation.⁵⁷

Nay now, what folly's this? Why will you fool yourself?
Why will you walk about thus with your eyes shut?
Treating for facts the self made hues that float
On tight pressed pupils, which you know are not facts.
(*Dipsychus*, 2.5.123-26).

Dipsychus' selective vision effects a similar extravagance of artifice by avoiding the complications of involvement with other people as a protection against the complex ambiguities of emotional life. Dipsychus' love of the far-off appears at first a sort of instinct towards a sublime grandeur, and perhaps it genuinely is, but through The Spirit's challenges this inclination comes to suggest aversion and subsequently evasion. Dipsychus' fondness for Ideals is plainly stated, but its emotive significance is generated through the context of his confused inadequacy when exposed to the world.

In contrast to an attendance to the close-up and particular, preoccupation with the idealistically generalised vista suggests a prophylactic means of experiencing the world. Distance is perhaps the simplest means of muting the din and blurring the complexity of an ambivalent world. The 'distance' of generalisation buffers the pleasures of disinterested observation and transcendent envisaging from any obligation to acknowledge internal contradictions and complexities; it is a perspective from which these stylised impressions can be felt to offer mooring facts of conviction.

Aimless and hopeless in my life I seem
To thread the winding byways of the town

⁵⁷ Clough, "On the Poetry of Wordsworth", *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, 305-21, 315.

Bewildered, baffled, hurried hence and thence,
 All at cross-purpose ever with myself
 Unknowing from whence from whither. Then in a moment,
 At a step, I crown the Campanile's top
 And view all mapped below. Islands, lagoon,
 An hundred steeples and a million roofs
 The fruitful champaign, and the cloud capt Alps
 And the broad Adriatic. Be it enough,
 If I lose this how terrible. No, no
 I am contented and will not complain.
 To the old paths, my soul! O be it so!
 (2.4.83-95).

Dipsychus rises, and "at a step" is at the Campanile's top. He is above, removed and looking down. The town is distanced, it becomes part of the "view all mapped below". From feeling himself threatened and surrounded by corruption Dipsychus at a remove confronts a city that is visual, diagrammatic and clear. The alternative perspective of clean distance and cluttered proximity produce an emotional reciprocation in the observer: by implication his involvement with external reality is, respectively, that of an all-seeing giant or piece of flotsam.

The desire to order experience as if contained within a pictorial frame suggests the wishful thinking of individuals frustrated and disoriented by their inability to satisfactorily encode fact and experience without artificially, and tellingly, omitting the manifest ambiguities these naturally involve. The disquiet of unrequitable desire (the frame is rarely as unobtrusive or fitting as it is required to be) is a further manifestation of the unpregnant pause, incorporating both confusion and protest. Dipsychus' defence of a specular existence demonstrates its complicity with emotivist conviction; the controlled lack of interactive involvement preserves the preferred "order of things" from unruly interruptions and challenges.

Maturer optics don't delight
 In childish dim religious light:
 In evanescent vague effects
 That shirk not face one's intellects
 They love not fancies fast betrayed
 And artful tricks of light and shade
 But pure form nakedly displayed,

And all things absolutely made.

(1.5.104-11).

Dipsychus' mode of seeing protects the "childish dim religious light" while The Spirit aims at making him see into the shade – his own blind spots and evasions - which appear to give this *trompe l'oeil* real substance. While Dipsychus seeks to quarantine the "insidious lewdness" (1.3.23) of The Spirit's voice as the whisperings of wickedness, a moral distinction, The Spirit detracts from Dipsychus' affinities in the name of time and growth; the most corporeal of admonishments.

In the image of the afterlife, aiming essentially to pre-emptively activate and control the desires and the fears of the dying, the mechanism of Christian consolation more or less admits its initial position of weakness. With regard to the other brutish betrayal of the unworldliness which God, as the biblical creator, intended for his creation, the post-lapsarian encryption of the animal reality of sexuality in a language of repression and transgression sees it similarly contextualised as a trial of obedience, in which individuals' capacity to fulfil the vision of their creator is measured.

In Dipsychus' uneasy approval of and allegiance to the ethical profile which Christian language bestows on sexual impulses, Clough explores a further point of challenge to the rhetorical provisions and strategies underlying the moral guidelines of conventional Christianity.

O yes, my pensive youth, abstain:

And any empty sick sensation

Any fierce hunger, any pain

You'll know is mere imagination.

(1.5.84-87).

Such an attribution relies for its credibility and potency on asserting a qualitative distinction between animal and spiritual appetites; it relies, that is, on instating an arbitrary and untenable schism or prejudice as an external fact. It is the failure of the rationalisations that had given this prejudice the semblance of objective credibility that, in *Dipsychus*, motivates Dipsychus' attempts to justify his habitually selective and judgemental relationship with reality. The Spirit later admonishes Dipsychus, "For a waste far off *may-be* overlooking/ The fruitful *is*, close by" (2.5.153-54).

The averted stare is not merely a means of ignoring inadmissible data, it propels the commitment and approval of the ostensibly ideological vision. In Dipsychus' selective focus, the dual influence of seeing what he wants to, and ignoring what he has to, demonstrates the closed circle of complicit causality which determines the conceptual xenophobia of ideological absolutes in an ambivalent world. Emotive persuasion has to address both the aversion and the desire, necessitating that its own rhetorical representation organise itself in the image of opposing arguments in order to reconstitute the contested idea to its own ends.

For arguments mounted in an environment that supports no common absolute, persuasion must proceed as carefully along the lines of exclusion as affirmation. The Spirit's own world-view is a product of a vision no less selective than that which it attacks in Dipsychus' idealism, and it is similarly averse to acknowledging the shortcomings of its ethic.⁵⁸ But as the shepherd or con-man indulging in the husbandry of a straying ideologue (Dipsychus the lost sheep), The Spirit is a fertile device in exposing the recommendations of a pragmatism that disguises itself as non-ideological.

Initially Dipsychus has the multiplicity of the world (of which he is disapprovingly aware) tamed within a framework of transcendent ideals, authorized or ratified by a personalised lexicon of biblical analogy and sermonising strictures. In contrast to The Spirit's light conversation Dipsychus intones his moral equations in the dense and esoteric language of his preferential worldview. The language in which Dipsychus carefully and ponderously unravels the pros and cons of succumbing to temptation throws up another barrier between himself and the world The Spirit touts for.

Shyness. 'Tis but another word for shame;
And that for Sacred Instinct. Off ill thoughts!
'Tis holy ground your foot has stepped upon.
(1.3.194-96).

⁵⁸ Not only is The Spirit's world-view equally selective in its organization of ambivalent patterns of human behaviour into moral categories, the fundamental impulse which governs this habit, essentially an insistence that the world can be understood and ordered in relation to a singular unifying principle or dogma, is common to the world-views of both Dipsychus and The Spirit. As a consequence of this predisposition, both The Spirit and Dipsychus seek to prove that the particular human tendencies, predilections and appetites which, respectively, they favour and exult in, represent doctrines of an external, determining law.

Dipsychus makes a similar use of the system of Christian virtue and humility later when, having accepted the insult of the Croat guard, he consoles himself with a vision of “How he and I at some great day shall meet / Before some awful judgement-seat of truth” (1.6.35-36). Similarly Dipsychus’ invocation of “The sword of the Lord and Gideon” (1.6.138) is a *useful* complaint. Dipsychus’ declamatory longing for the call of a higher cause suggests that, “things more merely personal to myself / Of all earth’s things do least affect myself” (1.6.148-49), might indeed be the reason for his refusal to seek revenge. The use of these approved tropes aims at charting a deliberately controlled path of falsely uncommitted and inevitably self-affirming “speculation”, such as that which Clough had denounced in relinquishing his subscription to the 39 Articles. Dipsychus’ resort to a model of Christian humility allows him the consolation of seeming to resolve both his purely personal reluctance to fight and his uncertainties as to the valid elements of an essentially aristocratic and outmoded code of honour, with a gesture of impersonal deference to a higher truth. In short, such deference provides Dipsychus with a template capable of bringing order to his troubled conscience by providing him with justification to ignore the ambiguities it rightly throws up. While these assertions of doctrine serve well enough to justify passive resistance (and oppositional activity too for that matter), they seem unable either to propose positive virtuous action, or to respond to ambivalent challenges (such as biological conformation) without attributing their influence to the worst self of unreason.

No kindly longing, no sly coyness now
 Nor a poor petal hanging to that stalk
 Where thousands once were redolent and rich.
 Look, she would fain allure; but she is cold
 The ripe lips paled, the frolick pulses stilled,
 The quick eye dead, the once fair flushing cheek
 Flaccid under its paint; the once heaving bosom –
 Ask not! for oh, the sweet bloom of desire
 In hot fruition’s pawey fingers turns
 To dullness and the deadly spreading spot
 Of rottenness inevitably soon
 That while we hold, we hate – Sweet Peace! no more!
 (1.3.102-13).

Throughout this scene in particular, the protective casing which Dipsychus’ language forms around his preferences meets with disapproval as he attempts to forge a

communicative moral rapport with the external world. The authority of the language of Dipsychus' biblical fables and expostulated strictures begins to fade with its failure to elicit The Spirit's approval of its credibility. The Spirit is not bi-partisan or double-minded, neither is it committed in the way Dipsychus, for instance, would like to be. Nevertheless, The Spirit's arguments project the semblance of a broadly considered conviction; it seems always familiar with Dipsychus' protests, and ready with a defusing retort conveying their narrow particularity.

That is the high moral way of talking
I'm well aware about street-walking.
(1.3.97-98).

This rejoinder to Dipsychus' description of "the flagrant woman of the street / Ogling for hirers, horrible to see" (1.3.95-96) offers a simple statement of the importance of the basic terms of persuasive definition.

Dipsychus' dialogue is scattered with poetic formulations, proxied prayers for emotive affirmation, or touchstones at the very least, of order. Dipsychus' relationship with these touchstones unravels dangerously on contact with The Spirit's challenge to the terms of their authority. The longing to make a secret self-image vibrant and real which compels the sharing of these touchstones is thwarted by The Spirit's dismantling of the conceptual relationships that Dipsychus seeks to have affirmed in this interaction. The worthiness of poetic stays and comforts seems challenged by the implications of this vulnerability. Touchstones do not dictate to the erratic and fallible human individual but exist as an extension of their desire; the value lies not in the poetic form but in the relationship that an individual forms with it.

The author of "Easter Day. Naples, 1849", whether approached as Dipsychus or Clough,⁵⁹ has organised himself and his environment into a form, through the expression of which he experiences a sense of liberation. "My brain was lightened when my tongue had said / Christ is not risen" (*Dipsychus*, 1.1.25-26). Dipsychus tells also how this realisation had come upon him in the street, "And did me good at once" (1.1.34).

⁵⁹ In attributing "Easter Day. Naples, 1849", along with fragments of *Amours*, to Dipsychus, Clough exhibits a compulsive propensity to qualify at distance. A discomfort at the prospect of sedentary self-

Where they have laid Him is there none to say!
 No sound, nor in, nor out; no word
 Of where to seek the dead or meet the living Lord;
 There is no glistening of an angel's wings,
 There is no voice of heavenly clear behest:
 Let us go hence, and think upon these things
 In silence, which is best.
 Is He not risen? No -
 But lies and moulders low -
 Christ is not risen.
 ("Easter Day. Naples, 1849", 147-56).

Dipsychus is exhilarated by his fledgling ability to throw off (or co-opt) the weight of the past, and also by the complementary propriety of speaking in accordance with the present, however confronting.⁶⁰

Dipsychus' verses generate an assurance which is genuine in its way but which nevertheless lacks the impervious universality of a principle distilled from a communal authority. As such this assurance survives on the strength of its emotional purchase; for Dipsychus this incorporates the proud sense that what convinces *him* is inherently convincing; his emotive clusters incorporate the nervous presumption that they command (or should command) universal approval. This presumption is swaddled in the abstract language of Dipsychus' higher line, a store of formulae which neatly outflanks the disagreements of any merely worldly or particular objection.

D: ... - call you this a Cause? I can't.
 oh he is wrong, no doubt. He misbehaves.
 But is it worth so much as speaking loud??
 And things more merely personal to myself
 Of all earth's things do least affect myself.

affirmation leads him to temper consolations, whether his own or his characters', with awareness of their contingency.

⁶⁰ Containing these essentially uncomplicated and starkly distilled statements of the state of divine authority there is nevertheless an element in Clough's shorter poems which anticipates and invites the refurbishing justifications which turn uncertainty back into faith. They exude a sense of wry certainty as to the fallibility of any proof or conviction, and an awareness of the inevitable opportunity for legitimate rejoinders permeates this expectancy. It is through this sense that Clough communicates the discord between intention and capability which is generated in these experiments with the language and credibility of ideological conviction. Clough's impulse to destabilise his own authoritative voice does not diminish the poems' capacity to deflate the epic tone of ideological discourse.

S: Sweet eloquence – at next may meeting
 How it would tell in the repeating!
 I recognise – and kiss the rod
 The methodistic voice of God
 I catch contrite that angel whine
 That snuffle human yet divine;
 The doctrine own, and no mistaker,
 Of the bland Philanthropic Quaker.
 (1.6.145-57).

Dipsychus' principles, preferences and presumptions are repeatedly undermined, as they are here, by The Spirit's retorts; this habit persistently insinuates Dipsychus' reliance on merely subjective images of "fact", and the ostensibly general moral postures (subjectively approved) which these images appear to support (his condemnation of worldly contingency, for example). The disclosure of their inherently contestable nature is both legitimate and cynical, the disruption occurs as a reflection of Dipsychus' prejudices but offers a new prejudice in its place.⁶¹

The speculative scepticism, for example, which Dipsychus both exercises and vents in his writings –

To please my own poor mind! To find repose,
 To physic the sick soul; to furnish vent
 To diseased humours in the moral frame.
 (2.1.33-35).

- are dismissed by The Spirit as:

A sort of seton, I suppose,
 A moral bleeding at the nose:
 Hm; and the tone too after all
 Something of the ironical?
 Sarcastic, say. Or were it fitter
 To style it the religious bitter?
 (2.1.36-41).

⁶¹ In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Jude Fawley demonstrates a comparable disposition when, having had his faith in the absolute authority of theological doctrines shaken, he funereally commits his religious texts to a grave in the garden. Since their aura of expert authority and legitimate command is tarnished Jude can find no place for any aspect of their teaching. Such dramatic gestures suggest a timorous naïvete that can't quite face up to or accept the anxieties of ambivalence and ambiguity, resorting instead to a histrionic indulgence of a distempered hostility towards the ambivalent world.

Dipsychus' writings suggest keepsakes, personal totems, but he seems unsure of their longevity. The Spirit attacks the credulous mawkishness of Dipsychus' personalised stays, attacking his relationship to the method and authority of his poetry. "The shadows lie, the glories fall, / And are but moonshine after all"(1.5.228-29). Tilting then at Wordsworth (1.5.256-61), The Spirit mocks the solely metaphoric credibility of lyricism, and its capacity to indulge a limitless mass of associations and formulas as foundations for the assertion of emotive fact: "Which and the sunset are bedfellows?" (1.5.261). Repeatedly throughout the poem, The Spirit points Dipsychus to his sources, Strauss, Berenger, Wordsworth and Goethe - "Trust me, I've read your German sage / To far more purpose e'er than you did" (1.5.88-89) - and thereby denounces his reliance on authorities and received hints even in the expression of his 'inmost I'. "Not by one's humour, which is the true truth" (1.4.37); the true truth, however, is just as likely a "pious rapture" (2.4.134) born "by lucky chance / Of happier-tempered coffee" (2.4.132-33). But more importantly the "true truth" of one's humour, aside from biological determination, is inseparable from the merely wishful and the repellent, the true truth cannot express itself without the terms that surround it because it has no substance in their absence, it is collaborative (or reactionary) not "received". Dipsychus' idealisation of the independent self's capacity for fulfilment or genuine expressive uniqueness conveys the ritualised tunnel vision and assertiveness of the dogmatic infatuate. To Dipsychus' mind the "dispassionate judgement" (1. 4.39) recommended by The Spirit is merely "vile consideration" (1.4.42).

The Spirit responds to Dipsychus' initial panic in its presence (1.3.29-62) by stating that its manner, far from the corrupting influence it is charged with, is shaped by a therapeutic intention. It is determined to cure Dipsychus of an over-ripeness which is fast tending towards a poeticised non-existence, which requires that it also perform a catalytic role. By exploiting and provoking his 'potential' and aspirations The Spirit will induce a graduation in Dipsychus from one stage to another - "To play your pretty woman's fool / I hold but fit for boys from school" (1.3.39-40) - it guides Dipsychus towards a mark of mature capability which it has modelled in the image suggested by worldly *savoir-faire*.

The Spirit attempts throughout to familiarise Dipsychus with the nature of his urges, and the possible expressions or consequences of his desires. While directing Dipsychus' stare towards the inadmissible provocations it avoids, The Spirit

simultaneously challenges the legitimacy of the tender conscience's self-perception. The persistence of Dipsychus' pure repose relies on his ability to dismiss The Spirit's emphasis on the "perfect show of girls" (1.2.33) as the solicitations of an "insidious lewdness" (1.3.23). In normalising the worldly world The Spirit's deflations of Dipsychus' overblown flights of pious dread seek to promote a reality in which the values and beliefs which support Dipsychus' cherished ideals appear legitimately contested, and the human proportion of the transgressions he ponders is more accurately (though still strategically) ascribed.

O yes, you dream of sin and shame
Trust me - it leaves one much the same
- 'Tisn't Elysium any more
Than what comes after or before:
But heavens! as innocent a thing
As picking strawberries in spring. -
You think I'm anxious to allure you.
My object is much more to cure you[.]
(1.3.29-36).

In railing against the lost opportunities Dipsychus' dreaminess has cost him The Spirit portrays his wastefulness as a crime against a natural order of which young ladies and young men, as much as any other creature, are a part. The Spirit carries on "With a hey and a ho, and a hey nonino", evoking an innocent sexual idyll, "betwixt the acres of the rye", featuring "pretty country folks" in "the pretty spring time" (1.3.126-31).⁶² Social interaction, regardless of sexual undertones and yet even more so because of them, is an immediate animal reality; disengagement from this is an affront to nature. Having argued the innocence of sexual activity, The Spirit appeals to Dipsychus in the rhetoric of duty, it begins to impress upon him the moral negligence of shying away.

Dipsychus' anxieties for a possible future of irrelevance, irresponsible profligacy and instability propel his devotion to the wishful proposition of a dignifying absolute in obedience to which the fulfilment of his charge as a human being will be assured. In the Spirit's image of Necessity he is now offered a form that takes the place of

⁶² A strategy that readily attaches itself to the problems of repression and overbearing "administration" of sexuality, as in *Measure for Measure* where prostitution out of hand sparks the hypocritical enforcement of the illegality of pre-marital sex. Claudio, condemned for his pre-marital affair, makes an unsuccessful appeal to the permissiveness implicit in the laws of nature and the open sexuality of bucolic idylls. The affected air of simplicity in both The Spirit's and Claudio's appeals invokes the strategic conclusion that human Law creates (or legislates) the perversions it then seeks to punish.

omniscient divinity, requiring only that he affirm it as such by subjecting himself to the tide of *laissez-faire*. Fundamental to the Spirit's persuasion though is the distortion of this subjection to fit the terms of Dipsychus' wishful proposition. As the obligatory adjunct to ability or privilege, the virtuous multiplication of one's "talents" haunts Dipsychus. Nevertheless, he seems far more concerned with maintaining the stock he starts with, the prospect that he might be responsible for a depletion or "fall" torments him fiercely. The essential uncertainty of risk and speculation (the foundations of much of Dipsychus' anxiety), is answered and resolved in formulations like "life loves no lookers on" by the implication that commitment to Necessity and the time-stream is an act of approval and personal affiliation that will be reciprocated.

Who takes implicitly her will
For these her vassall-chances still
Bring store of joys, successes, pleasures.
But whoso ponders weighs and measures
She calls her torturers up to goad
With spur and scourges on the road;
He does at last with pain whate'er
He spurned at first. Of such beware
(2.5.96-103).

It is, the Spirit notes, some wiser youth that succeeds with the girl. What kind of wisdom are we to suppose this is then? Superficial? Decadent? Or is it natural and harmless, innocent and proper? The fluidity of these esteemed distinctions reflects the contestable interpretation of morally loaded terms, the meanings of which are under challenge throughout Clough's poem. The usefulness of these terms is not for establishing accord and fixed moral standards, but as ciphers through which individuals express, and potentially hone, their subjective impressions. In this context, "wiser" begins to suggest a comic inversion of Dipsychus' implied definition: he no doubt considers himself wiser than his successful rival, but in The Spirit's quip there is the seed already of a legitimate challenge and counter-claim to the qualities which confer "wisdom".

Something of the ease and subsequent fragility of emotive conviction is apparent in The Spirit's evaluation of Dipsychus' abstract props and stays. Dipsychus' consolation is genuine, but so is the sense of deprivation which necessitates it. "To cherish natural instincts, yet to fear them / And less than any use them" (2.4.109-10)

while choosing in turn to “be consoled / With thinking one is clever”(2.4.111-12). The transformation from dissatisfied fear to the intellectual consolation of abstinence is effected on the strength of the proposition that an individually esteemed or simply approved order *is* present, in relation to which dissatisfaction can be redescribed in the language of virtue. The credibility of the approved order Dipsychus proposes, and, therefore, the suitability of his language of virtue, is readily shaken.

The Spirit asserts the inadequacy of Dipsychus’ terms, implicitly charging them with a reflexive dissembling which disguises their inability to reify the reality they lay claim to.

To burn forsooth for action, yet despise
Forsooth, its accident and alphabet[;]
Cry out for service, and at once rebel
At the application of its plainest rules
This, you call life, my friend, reality
Doing your Duty unto God and man,
I know not what.

(2.4.118-24).

Dipsychus’ moral distinctions and preferences, The Spirit implies, are the result of a conceptual illiteracy for which his belief in the rights of “vain independentness” (2.5.36) is compensation and disguise. The Spirit works towards compelling Dipsychus to redefine his esteemed virtues in its lexicon, by disenchanting his own.

Dipsychus’ ideals are achieved through the self, or rather, affirmed therein. They are not, however, the organically assured internal convictions which they seem to him; this is one of The Spirit’s most telling revelations. Alongside the reductive and trivialising explanations which The Spirit’s commentary offers, Dipsychus’ allegiance to the moral foundations of Christianity comes to seem a matter of circumstance, the receptacle of a mystic monastic appetite for devotion and surrender to a transcendent cause. His only justification, an individually purposeful commitment to socially uncommitted or purposeless “blank thought”, seems to him unfulfilling; potentially facile or selfish (it might be merely deluded self-indulgence), this uncommitted idealism does not fit the posture of devoted duty he had expected to adopt.

Is it a thing ordained then, is it a clue
For my life’s conduct, is it a law for me

That opportunity shall breed distrust
Not passing until that pass.
(2.5.6-9).

Toying with this idea Dipsychus asks himself further, "How shall I then explain it to myself / That in blank thought my purpose lives[?]" (2.5.15-16). How, Dipsychus appears to wonder, can he formulate this intuition into an ethic, a story or personal plot, capable of satisfying his expectations of such. The actual facts of his "life's conduct" suggest a directionless scepticism which is implicitly unsatisfactory to his aspiration towards the purposeful and prestigious affiliation to a higher line.

Dipsychus is briefly able to entertain the ambiguity (a stylised reflection of multiform truth) that imperfect knowledge, desire and reality make of moral equivocation: "What we call sin / I could believe a painful opening out / Of paths for ampler virtue" (2.4.42-44). At the same time, though, while his double-mindedness reflects his perception of multiple ethical possibilities, this is over-seen and made doubly problematic by feelings of responsibility to discern a single and unimpeachable certainty. It is this demand which is implicated in Dipsychus' remonstrance with his lack of conviction, "O double self! / And I untrue to both" (2.4.71-72), and which is behind the unconvincing organisation of this multiplicity into a selective qualification of the better and the worse self (1.3.6).

The Spirit seeks to dispute the underlying emotional self-image that nourishes Dipsychus' Christian idealism by disrupting the associations and preferences this self-image projects as an affirming reality, supportive of its subjective insight. This projection is responsible for establishing the foundations and, therefore, the goals or "actions" of a dutiful existence. Dipsychus' speech in the fourth scene of Part 2 seems genuinely bi-partisan (as are his arguments throughout Scene 3 for the virtue of either participating in, or refraining from, the mean world of petty actions). Point and counterpoint jostle together in genuine confusion, a condition which is notably absent from The Spirit's shrewd engagement with ideas that might threaten its argument. Dipsychus expresses his preferences as possibilities (that is, tentative proposals) while their inadequacies and alternatives are voiced alongside. At times, "All is mean, / And nought as I would have it" (2.4.78-79), at others, "the vext needle perfect to her poles"

(2.4.82). In what appears a commonplace fluctuation of mood the absolutism which Dipsychus deems incumbent on any worthy conviction gives him cause for febrile accusations. "O perfect, if 'twere all. But it is not. / Hints haunt me ever of a More beyond" (2.4.38-39). With Dipsychus' devotion to pure imperatives comes the propensity to "think indeed the perfect call / Should force the perfect answer" (2.4.63-64). The Spirit's response erodes the solidity of the higher line, destabilising Dipsychus' impression of the essential stability attainable through his ideals.

The Spirit's allegedly didactic intentions are apparent in the tone of its committed deflation of Dipsychus' faltering ethic. As the battle of analogies continues, The Spirit takes on the tone of an impatient school-master.

Up, then. Up, and be going. The large world
The thronged life waits us. –

Come, my pretty boy,
You have been making mows to the blank sky
Quite long enough for good. We'll put you up;
Into the higher form. 'Tis time you learn
The Second Reverence, for things around.

(2.5.111-116).

Aside from undermining the particular ideas and images by which Dipsychus' satisfied stasis is conceptually anchored, the tone and language of The Spirit's curative "rough shake" are intended to corrupt them with a repellent immaturity. Such corruption aims to ensure that Dipsychus' once proud posture of ideological protest becomes intolerably awkward. These corrosive associations fuse with Dipsychus' fear of being "behind the world", thereby registering a disruptive counterpoint to the ensemble of emotional associations which support his personal idealism. Alongside Dipsychus' devotion to the idea of dutiful service and a sense of obligation as one of "Nature's captains" (2.3.68), The Spirit renders Dipsychus' prudence in the provoking image of "An o'ergrown baby, sucking at the dugs / Of Instinct, dry long since"(2.5.179-80).

The tone of this curative “rough shake”(2.5.109), is the self-assured superiority granted by a formulaic or readymade certainty (the domineering tone of an impatient schoolmaster). The Spirit speaks with an authoritative tone promising penetrating and particular insight; “yet as for you” is the prelude to further insult but it also asserts the seductive intimacy of a complicit audience. The intimacy of The Spirit’s insults capitalises on Dipsychus’ sense of dissatisfied division by recommending one particular

prejudice as a source of clarity. The terms and images The Spirit invokes throughout belong to Dipsychus, they are drawn directly from his own array of negative and positive self-images and postures.⁶³ Reason alone cannot save Dipsychus from The Spirit's attack because reason admits the plausibility of its worldview. The poet's uncle acknowledges, in the Epilogue, that though the poem contained "a great deal that was unmeaning, vague, and involved; and what was most plain was least decent and least moral", The Spirit had said "much which if only it hadn't been for the way he said it, and that it was he who said it, would have been sensible enough".⁶⁴

Dipsychus' generalising instinct claims the abstract as a safe haven; it is the realm in which his discourse is most at ease, most expert. This is more properly a *sense* of expertise, based upon Dipsychus' personal approval of abstract thought as an activity affording its subjects a dignity as absolute as the ideal of knowledge to which it is devoted. The Spirit's relentless particularity forces Dipsychus to participate in a discussion which, logically, his faith would not suffer. In the course of this discussion the character of Dipsychus' affiliation with the abstract changes as his own line of defence reveals that his faith is an article of personal approval and preference (for Dipsychus or the reader).

Simultaneously, though, there is a further "discussion" taking place; it involves the apparent inability of Dipsychus' faith effectively to rest upon its own logical assurances, and therein his inability to dismiss the challenges that attend the "vile cravings" of a flesh and blood creature.

As a secular idealism, Dipsychus' abstract code is vulnerable to The Spirit's cynical sedition. While others live life, taunts The Spirit, Dipsychus will live in

⁶³ The Spirit attempts continually to sour Dipsychus' esteem for the habits necessitated by his idealistic unworldliness. To show the absurd inappropriateness in Dipsychus' terms of evaluating his place and entitlements in reality: "To move on angels' wings were sweet; / But who would therefore scorn his feet[?] / It cannot walk up to the sky / It therefore will lie down and die / Rich meats it don't obtain at call / It therefore will not eat at all. / Por babe! and yet a babe of wit. / But common sense? not much of it" (2.4.179-86). And of his devotion to discerning a pure inspiration – "To see things simply as they are / Here at our elbows, transcends far / Trying to spy out at midday / Some 'bright particular star' which may, / Or not, be visible at night / But clearly is not in daylight" (2.3.168-73). Throughout the poem The Spirit challenges Dipsychus to admit that the distorted reflection of his ideological habits and convictions which it holds up to him registers the truth of his devotions. The discrepancy between this selectively distorted image and Dipsychus' own self-conception are intended to provoke him to scorn and betray the allegedly defunct ideals: "This, you call life, my friend, reality / Doing your duty to God and Man" (2.4.122-23). The Spirit accepts the trajectory and intention of Dipsychus' idealistic urges and commitment but shows him the Christian particulars and his personal application of them as quite in contradiction to the absolute order which it convinces him is inherent in secular capitalism.

⁶⁴ Clough, *Dipsychus*, Epilogue, 3-11.

imagined realities, building up “baseless fabrics of romance / And heroism upon historic sand” (2.4.116-17). And while burning “for Action”, he will “despise / Forsooth, its accident and alphabet”, and baulk at the plainest rules of the service he cries out for (2.4.118-21). While The Spirit’s parodies of Dipsychus’ idealistic inertia seem justly to accuse him of a failure to match actions to words, they rely on a reductivist impatience with the ambiguous virtues of abstract thought.⁶⁵ Although a cry for service incorporating or accompanied by resistance to its “plainest rules” does contain the possibility of hypocrisy, it might also convey sincere confusion or a genuinely scrupulous discrimination between desired and apparent gratifications. Throughout its attacks on Dipsychus’ preferences, The Spirit’s bombast drowns out the concerns which inform these eccentricities and holds them solely at the value of their superficial manifestation in public expressions which are unavoidably inchoate, speculative and vulnerable.

In the course of Dipsychus’ lament for a departed God (1.7.7-129) an assortment of traditional roles, vocations and consolations are set upon with a disdain for their merely partial truth. Dipsychus’ long rant suggests a reluctant and resentful acknowledgment of the grounds for The Spirit’s worldliness, alloyed with indignation at finding his idol incapable of supporting his position. Dipsychus is deprived of the kind of encouragement and approval which would galvanise his intellectual and emotional commitment to his abstract ideals into what he could consider a valid conviction. Dipsychus seems to consent to the implications of God’s death - “O pretty girl, who trippiest along / Come to my bed, it isn’t wrong” (1.7.19-20) - but his reiteration of The Spirit’s catalogue of worldly virtues is invoked in a tone of sneering disapproval. The “damsels eager to be loved” (1.2.46) for whom The Spirit touts, are still wed in Dipsychus’ mind to a prejudice which, denied recourse to “sin”, is maintained as a sense of personal (and therefore isolating) moral opposition. Dipsychus’ sullen disdain for worldly self-interest reduces The Spirit’s images of liberation to the “thin joys”

⁶⁵ The Spirit claims its own rights to a certain higher line and code of propriety, in contrast to the way it is perceived by Dipsychus.

What? You know not that I too can be serious
Can speak big words, and use the tone imperious;
Can speak – not honeyedly of love and beauty,
But sternly of a something much like Duty?
(2.5.57-60).

(1.7.122) that remain once the dissolution of mutual care and interest has stripped them of any dignifying depth of meaning.

O Rosalie, my lovely maid
I think thou thinkest love is true
And on thy faithful bosom laid
I almost could believe it too
The villainies, the wrongs; the alarms
Forget we in each other's arms
No justice here; no God above;
But where we are, is there not love[?]
What? What? thou also go'st? For how
Should dead truth live in lover's vow[?]
(1.7.108-117).

Dipsychus begins to demonstrate the feelings of betrayal or desertion which later dominate his sullen submission to necessity. His inability to earn or sustain any external support or sympathy for a code he had considered absolute, god-given, leaves him hostile to and frustrated with the force he will submit to, and with the "silence" in the secular world of the authorities he had hoped would provide external support for his protest.

With the simple recollection of Dipsychus' own habits, and with The Spirit's flair for envisaging Dipsychus among other people (the scenario he disdains most), the particulars of the stolen child of heaven are reconstituted as the foibles of a feckless touring eccentric. The Spirit conducts its *reductio ad absurdum* on the associations by which Dipsychus has moulded stasis into a decisive poise.

Stay at Venice, if you will,
Sit musing in its churches hour on hour,
Cross-kneel upon a bench; climb up at whiles
The neighbouring tower, and [kill] the lingering day
With old comparisons. When night succeeds
Evading, yet a little seeking, what
You would and would not, turn your doubtful eyes
On moon and stars to help morality.
(2.4.124-31).

Idealism has been cast as the brain-softening affiliation which marks "vague romantic girls and boys" (1.5.237). Dipsychus' arrested development earns him the distinction of

being addressed as “it”, a diminutive which is at once patronising, dismissive, and emasculating. And though neuter at present, The Spirit taunts Dipsychus with an eventual fall into sexuality: “The hapless prey / Of some chance chambermaid, more sly than fair” (2.4.142-3).

In The Spirit’s depiction, Dipsychus’ abstract rigour is portrayed merely as the solipsist’s mechanism of evasive self-preservation. Dipsychus’ isolation is given an emphasis which places consolation foremost as the determining factor of his table of virtues; The Spirit devalues Dipsychus’ association with earnestness, cleverness, heroism and duty (2. 4.104-47). The schema Dipsychus had considered an external ethical guide is disparaged as a collection of self-approved postures and self-affirming idiosyncracies. Dipsychus nests on himself in scrupulous deference to a specific end (virtue, salvation, purity), but this is simply disregarded, leaving the insinuations of solely circumstantial and personal motivations: “[T]o inhume / Your ripened age in solitary walks, / For self discussion”(2.4.105-07). The Spirit’s repetition of Dipsychus’ supplication to the “moon and stars” (lines 130-31 above) epitomises the deliberately literal approach with which The Spirit excludes the abstract associations that Dipsychus seeks to validate. The background from which Dipsychus’ emblems of purity draw their significance is simply not admitted, a restriction which reduces Dipsychus’ symbolic language to an absurdly discrepant fetishism or an arbitrary evasion.⁶⁶ Logically, mountains and stars have nothing to do with morality; their appearance in Dipsychus’ moral equivocations suggests, therefore, that they serve as totems of projected authority or as the arbitrary focus of a moral conscience undertaking evasive action (“O you shirk / You try and slink away” (2.5.121-22). Either way, the layers of metaphor which inform Dipsychus’ double-minded stasis are reduced, in The Spirit’s rendition, to a credulous dependence on forms that have no common substance. “Why will you fool yourself?” (2.5.123) The Spirit asks, “Why will you walk about thus with your eyes shut?” (2.5.124), deferring to the “self-made hues that float / On tight pressed pupils” (2.5.125-26). The Spirit has already attacked Dipsychus’ appetite for metaphor over fact, representation over reality, and its questions here contain an implicit

⁶⁶ For providing an image of divine order, including such ideas as the music of the spheres and the various alignments of human significance in keeping with the Earth’s relation to the Sun and the Sun’s relation to some other centre, the arrangement of celestial bodies has a long standing resonance to spiritual concerns. Clinton Machann, in “ “The centre is no centre”: Astronomical Imagery in Clough’s Prose” (*The Arnoldian*, 12, 1 (1984), 22-31), observes furthermore that cosmic imagery, “often appealed to Victorian writers dealing with themes of redefinition and uncertainty in social or religious vision in an age of transition from a religious apprehension of the universe to a scientific and secular one” (22).

accusation. Dipsychus' selective vision and "self made hues" sustain an accord between his particular perception of fact and his general expression of reality. Dipsychus, burrowing in his bedroom (2.4.137), is isolating and guarding his cherished "mouthful of air" (2.5.142) from "The strong fresh gale of life" (2.5.141) in which, asserts The Spirit, it will simply dissipate. Due to the nature of Dipsychus' desired authority The Spirit's judgement is right: Dipsychus is unable to value the symbolic and abstract protests implicit in his idealism. As simply a personal orientation to an ambiguous moral scene the values implicit in his ideals are useless because Dipsychus, dominated by his commitment to the kind of code and consolation provided by an external authority, cannot accept secular acts of moral discrimination as valid grounds for commitment. What he allows in their place though is a worldly travesty of the traditions this appetite embodies and perpetuates.

Again in scene 5, The Spirit's policy is one of trivialisation; "making mows to the blank sky" (2.5.113) might well be what Dipsychus has been doing, but the material fact (which is all The Spirit will acknowledge) is again allowed to eclipse the underlying equivocations which determine Dipsychus' deportment.

The "necessity" which The Spirit recommends is ultimately one of pessimism and pragmatism, subsequent to a denial of the prospect of any worthwhile inspiration. The sneering dismissal of hope and abstract commitment is similar to the cynical Christianity of Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor, in each case ethical stagnation is the incidental price of an easy conscience.

Prate then of passions you have known in dreams
 Of huge experience gathered by the eye,
 Be large of aspiration; pure in hope,
 Sweet in fond longings, but in all things vague.
 Breathe out your dreamy scepticism, relieved
 By snatches of old songs; People will like that, doubtless.
 Or will you write about Philosophy
 For a waste far off *may-be* overlooking
 The fruitful *is*, close by[?] Live in metaphysic,
 With transcendental logic fill your stomach,
 Schematise joy, effigiate meat and drink,
 Or let me see, a mighty Work, a Volume,
 The Complemental of the inferior Kant,
 The Critic of Pure Practic; based upon
 The Antinomies of the Moral Sense; for look you,
 We cannot act without assuming x

And at the same time y its contradictory.
Ergo, to act. People will buy that, doubtless.
(2.5.146-63).

The Spirit here sets its sights quite clearly on the specifics both of Dipsychus' idealised self-conception and of the actual principles on which his abstinence maintains its status as a virtue. By way of an asserted contraction of the legitimate field of moral activity, justified by tone only, The Spirit marginalises Dipsychus' equivocations. The transformation of Dipsychus 'virtues' from approbatory to pejorative categories is conducted with no engagement in the internal validity of Dipsychus' argument, The Spirit simply presumes their irrelevance to the here and now. The dilemma which binds Dipsychus and The Spirit, the desire for and provision of objectively approved actions, reveals the trajectory of scepticism that is motivated by the prospect of rationally validating an absolute principle of action (as opposed, for instance, to guiding an individual *decision*).⁶⁷

By the end of the poem, The Spirit has turned Dipsychus' feelings of resistance inside out, what had initially constituted a betrayal becomes an act of obedience to the "law" of human growth. The troubling implication of transgression against his ideal is evaded by a selective emphasis on those aspects of the trade which admit the image of dutiful acquiescence – "Be it then thus: since that it must, it seems. / Welcome, o world henceforth; and farewell dreams" (2.7.20-21) - as opposed to individually initiated change. Beneath the surface of this concession therefore, Dipsychus avoids tarnishing the image of the ideal to which he had professed such a strong allegiance. He also, and more importantly perhaps, maintains an essentially similar posture of disinterested

⁶⁷ Rather than acknowledging the unsettled fluid mass of secular moral abstraction as Claude ultimately does in his evocative analogy of a cormorant existence:

Ah, but ye that extrude from the ocean your helpless faces,
Ye over stormy seas leading long and dreary processions,
Ye, too, brood of the wind, whose coming is whence we discern not,
Making your nest on the wave, and your bed on the crested billow,
Skimming rough waters, and crowding wet sands that the tide shall return to,
Cormorants, ducks, and gulls, fill ye my imagination!
Amours, III.iv.91-96.

I have discussed this passage in greater detail elsewhere. Dipsychus accepts the ambiguous dictates of worldly necessity to be the solid ground The Spirit depicts it as and consents to let himself 'rest' upon it. Dipsychus might as easily have been converted to Catholicism, perhaps, or a supernatural mysticism of some kind, though he would have still faced the problem of his worldly appetites. It is not surprising, though, that secular models which provide individuals with a sense of devotion to a cause greater than their own self-interest, such as socialism, do not appeal to Dipsychus: he requires an authority unsullied by the inadequacies of human intellectual induction.

subservience which dilutes moral anxiety and allows him to rest on the solid ground of externally sanctioned conduct. The superficial change of emphasis (from transgression to obedience, as also with the Spirit's confrontation of the sexual anxieties that dominate Part 1) is facilitated by Dipsychus' willingness to perceive the Spirit's law in the terms it offers him. These terms, after all, are tailored to Dipsychus' desire for the ease and authority of commitment and action undertaken in subsequent accord between self-esteem and external approval. They are the seductive foundations of conservative and conventional ease of conscience, implicit in the world from which Dipsychus has previously been able to hold aloof. As his ideal begins to appear ambiguous and subjective, Dipsychus is forced, in spite of his continued emotional attachment and intellectual regard for the principles it embodies, to forego it. The compromised capacity of Dipsychus' ideal to support his fidelity to it as an act of dutiful submission to an absolute, forces him to seek some creed that can. The possibility that Dipsychus might accept personal responsibility for the values his ideal previously authorised and sanctioned is anathema to his perception of the status and function of an abstract moral code.

It is plain that The Spirit's "convictions" are as selective (and therefore as contestable) as it corrosively proves Dipsychus' Christian idealism to be. Its claim to purvey an absolute mandate, though, is ultimately not founded in any singular or stable abstract virtue ("necessity" is the cipher it uses to gain its end), it is accountable solely for its capacity to "sell" the notion of an *idealistic* commitment to conformity. The Spirit speaks on behalf of accumulated norms - the commonplace values and conventions of impious middle-class materialism - from which Dipsychus has deliberately and disdainfully (for the most part) held aloof.⁶⁸ It extends an invitation to "join-in" which is not new to him but which had previously been easily silenced by a steadier faith. In expression, The Spirit's principles are formed into whatever rhetorical devices are necessary to shift Dipsychus. The Spirit seeks out Dipsychus' desire for certainty or "confidence" and uses it as the fulcrum to turn his relationship to the world. The Spirit's moral position as such is not adequately definable in terms of its principles

⁶⁸ At one point The Spirit throws Dipsychus' perception of it - "This worldly fiend that follows you about / The compound of convention and impiety / This mongrel of uncleanness and propriety" (2.5.48-50) - back in his face. This elliptical retort, reclaiming Dipsychus' pejorative discrimination as the sign of his ignorance of new standards of propriety, presents a distilled example of The Spirit's methods throughout the poem. The Spirit implies that Dipsychus' disdain for "convention and impiety", marks his values as outmoded, rather than marking the Spirit as base.

(which are cynically hollow), but rather in relation to the imperative of gaining its end and the methodology this determines.

That Dipsychus does not counter The Spirit's emotive strategies by undermining their particularities in kind is due partly to his maintaining the outward posture of faith, and partly to his awareness of the instabilities and ambiguities corrupting his previously assured point of resistance. The natural ambivalence which he begins to recognise wherever he seeks the support of supernatural authority, and which is the empirical first principle of secular individualism, merely serves Dipsychus as the formless background in which to locate a pattern capable of reaffirming the abstract virtues he maintains by preference but which are no longer ratified by higher powers. That this order is not forthcoming is the source of Dipsychus' vulnerability to The Spirit's cynical selectivity. In contrast to this selective persuasion, the distempered perceptions with which Dipsychus views a world abandoned by God effect a similar approval of the desirability of an extreme or absolute position. This sense of intermingled allegiance and abandonment generates the tension which determines the unpregnant pause. Promising an end to this uncomfortable state of equivocal rights and obligations, The Spirit binds Dipsychus to a false clarity.

Dipsychus' devotion to the dignity of idealistic service provides the vital lever in The Spirit's campaign to shift him from his idealistic nest. Like Don Quixote (or Conrad's Lord Jim, whose honour code makes him predictable and vulnerable to exploitation by the cynical pragmatists, Cornelius and Gentleman Brown) such idealists are open to the abuses practised on them by individuals who do not share their ideals but nevertheless recognise their idealism as an easy point of exploitation. It is *because* of his idealism and his need for a platform of disinterested duty that Dipsychus surrenders the ideal he cherishes but cannot authoritatively qualify. He is no longer certain, not whether his otherworldly or Christian ideal is in itself valid, but whether it is pertinent to a changing world. Dipsychus' ideal is remote, common practice is against it, but his inability to accept that the absolutes he desires do not exist (other than through the dignity independently invested in them as symbols) forces him to accept the law in which The Spirit, knowing his tastes, has idealised convention. To Dipsychus, convinced by The Spirit's persuasion, submission no longer seems an abandonment of the ideal of dignifying subjection to a cause, but its only possible expression.

The Spirit manipulates Dipsychus' need to invest his existence with a purpose which, if not higher as he would prefer, at least transcends mere personal desires and

interests. The Spirit assures him that in serving “necessity” this is the case, and, though resentful and sullen, Dipsychus’ concession to mundane law also contains an element of relief. That Dipsychus’ particular personal desire is formed in the image of an abstemious ideal of disinterested service to a greater good adds an ironic element of travesty to his dutiful submission to The Spirit’s worldly image of an alternative mode of serving good through simple gratification of worldly requirements. The comforts of deferential subservience which he has become dependent on betray him to The Spirit’s false idealisation of acquiescence to circumstance.

The success of The Spirit’s arguments, in spite of their inherently contestable foundations, reflects furthermore the state of disrepair into which moral absolutism leads itself. Ultimately, The Spirit owes Dipsychus’ commitment to the contingent strictures of Necessity to his approval of the absolute obligation it has been presented as. The reverence for duty nurtured by his own “Most High” authority drives him dizzily into a paradoxical act of treacherous devotion. Dipsychus’ assertion that “How much soe’er / I might submit, it must be to rebel” (2.6.58-59), strikes The Spirit as special pleading through which he is “working out, his own queer way” (2.6.96), how to let go of one idea of duty for another without incriminating himself as a traitor, or his past ideals as hollow. Dipsychus’ situation reflects the difficulties of moral equivocation undertaken by the individual idealist in the absence of clear certainties. Under the influences of The Spirit’s fabricated semblance of moral certainty, these dilemmas or choices are subsumed into a sacrifice which is undertaken as a dutiful resignation to an undesirable but apparently legitimate new ordinance. As the coercive pressure of the world, or as the projected inspiration of unconscious appetites, the success of The Spirit’s arguments reflects the problematic dependence of “rational” foundations of absolute authority on a willingness to accept a false currency of reason.

In the secular and ambivalently natural world, abstractions such as honour, justice and morality lose the clear parameters guaranteed by divine sanction. Nevertheless, such abstractions remain conceptually strong as tools for establishing secular codes. In both Claude’s and Dipsychus’ quests to affirm a stable hierarchy of proprieties, though, an anxious dependence on external absolutes prevails and renders any contestable order of meaning unsatisfactory. At the same time, though, the context and tone of Claude’s negating acuity offer insights into the role played by abstract ideas of truth or higher meaning in individuals’ relationships with an ambivalent world: the idea provides the

necessary support for a kind of conduct without which moral agreement would be impossible.

Once the realisation is made that no legitimate absolute position exists to disparage these finite choices, or otherwise recommend effective action, stable moral codes can be intellectually approved and chosen while also admitting their partial and particular credibility. It is the absolutists' failure or refusal to make this concession, that renders their devotions to morality and truth so problematic, angst-ridden, and potentially dangerous in the natural or secular world.

Deep Waters

Neither Dipsychus nor The Spirit represents an ethic capable of a purely rational refutation of opposing convictions. Together, Dipsychus and The Spirit demonstrate how false truths result from any argument which, in spite of this limitation, aims at establishing a constant and certain position (a limitation representative of the field of abstract equivocation after the loss of a divine ordering presence). Dipsychus seeks approval for the code with which he resists the impositions of upper-middle class careerism and the conventions which idealise material contingencies of life. The Spirit, however, challenges Dipsychus' sense of duty with a version of reality in which his only moral path is to abandon the ideals on which this code is founded. Dipsychus requires proof, his modern conception of faith incorporates an empirical responsibility in reaction to the kinds of arguments raised against it and in order to assure himself of religion's worthiness of devotion. The empirical truth, though, as Dipsychus recognises and acknowledges, is that divine authority is open to query, and its truths and laws appear accordingly tenuous. In his dutiful esteem for the role of external authority, Dipsychus is susceptible to the false certainties provided by The Spirit, and is compelled, willingly though resentfully, to deny his ideals. Given that he cannot convince himself of their general significance beyond his own contingent affirmations of their worth, Dipsychus will not, or cannot, grant his ideals a role in his relationship with reality. Through his desire for absolute certainty Dipsychus is doubly duped. He is forced to give up his ideals essentially because he cannot grant them meaning or value solely as subjective acts of engagement with concerns that transcend his subjectivity.

The implication of the interaction between Dipsychus' vulnerable and ultimately negligent absolutism, and the false authority the Spirit conjures to exploit it, conveys implications common to Clough's work: the inability to locate common absolutes is intrinsic to the secular world; devotion to the idea of absolutes, whether as a critical quest to verify one, or in dutiful desire to serve any authority that appears in their image, results in isolation, delusion and dissatisfied hostility towards reality and others. Uncommitted ambiguity appears to offer the only rationally unimpeachable position or vantage point. However, the practical necessity of moral orientations requires that individual choices be made from a variety of credible possibilities, and that they be made while recognising that any one of these choices involves an accepted disregard for the valid but incompatible considerations implied in the alternative possibilities. It is pyrrhonism galvanised with necessity to bring about choices aware of the philosophical or abstract structures they have breached, and more importantly *why* they have done so. As long as choice, or decisive appraisal (work or starve), is admitted, rather than being wrong-headedly externalised and dignified as duty to a law, the purity of the uncommitted ambiguity it proceeds from remains as the foundation of individual responsibility for participating in agreement.

In the course of "special pleading" (2.6.93) through which Dipsychus hopes to extricate himself from affirming the responsibilities of common commitment, he finally discovers a form which serves the purpose: the kidnapped child of heaven, submitting to rebel. The image serves Dipsychus, but it also serves The Spirit; it facilitates Dipsychus' consent to acknowledge the "predestined figure" of submission, which, regardless of Dipsychus' rationalisations, is the very outcome The Spirit had intended for him (2.6.92-99). Dipsychus' most compelling need is clearly revealed in this salvaging act, he must feel himself aligned with a certain and certifiable right. For The Spirit to call him Joseph and Don Quixote (1.3.135) at the start is one thing, but with the doubt engendered by The Spirit's insinuations that his virtue has been the delusion of a chivalry "That turns to nothing all" (1.3.137), his anxiety that this chivalry might actually brand him "infatuate" drives Dipsychus where The Spirit chooses. Dipsychus' unresolved uncertainty of the credibility of Christian morality in the absence of God, is agitated by the emotional and psychological discomfort of his uncommitted limbo and his remoteness from any external provision of moral support. The pivot of his idealism, ever-vulnerable, is the proper allegiances and conduct of the enlightened elite. This is why John Holloway, in *The Proud Knowledge*, sees *Dipsychus* as representing a turning

point in the quest narrative, wherein necessity and the everyday appear to triumph over agnostic allegiance to absolutes.⁶⁹ Abstract moral equivocations aside, Dipsychus *must* earn his bread, and can no longer call on established truths, conventions or vocations to shelter him from this necessity. What Dipsychus had considered an actual link and guide to a greater meaning is persuasively presented to him as an internally contained and sustained impression of meaning.⁷⁰ Dipsychus' declaration, "I come into deep waters / Where no ground is" (2.5.106-7), announces his awakening to the aqueousness he has been trained to avoid.

⁶⁹ John Holloway, *The Proud Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977). In *The Proud Knowledge*, Holloway suggests that *Dipsychus* announces a reversal in the standards of validity of quests for absolute meaning. "The Mephistopheles-figure no longer leads the hero towards even an *ignis fatuus* of truth. It nudges him contemptuously away" (149). Thereby reflecting, Holloway implies, a cultural dismissal of the heroic status to which such quests for abstract absolutes had previously registered a claim. Holloway suggests that "[w]hat is significant from the standpoint of the quest-poem is simply that Clough is able to use the Faust legend, long a major vehicle for exploring the myth of the quest and its glories and its dangers, as if it had no such provenance" (148-49). Without an awareness of this provenance, though, such an exploration would be meaningless; it is the fundamental context of any comment the poem makes in relation to this myth. Similarly, Clough's poem depends upon this provenance as the provokingly inadequate background to its depiction of the complex friction which permeates the secular dialogue between idealism and worldly engagement. Holloway makes Clough's poem seem implicitly to affirm the path of Dipsychus' reluctant conversion. That Mephistopheles no longer offers the diabolical temptation towards forbidden knowledge but rather, "a brisk and cynical, even callous, dismissal of all such nonsense" (149), is an accurate enough reflection of The Spirit's *modus operandi* but seems to neglect the relationship to Dipsychus' particular affinities for which this method is formed. Nevertheless, the apparent success of Mephistopheles' "dismissal of all such nonsense" suggests to Holloway a shift away from any tangible justification of abstract quests, a suggestion which seems affirmed in Dipsychus' reluctant submission to worldliness. But Clough's depiction of an unravelling in the quest for absolutes is concerned with the particular fundamental predicates this quest had typically been guided by, and which had become dangerously retrograde, rather than with the quest for knowledge itself. Such quests are not shown by Clough to be meaningless or superfluous, rather these quests are merely in need of a clarification of the roots from which they stem and the purposes which they can and do serve.

⁷⁰ In *The Audience in the Poem* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), Dorothy Mermin suggests that the "casual", "flexible" and familiar voice Clough uses in *Amours*, "asserts its rights as poetry largely by demonstrating that the romantic, lyrical tradition it intends to displace cannot be sustained in the everyday world. But this demonstration is not cynical, or even particularly sad. For at the end the poem offers us, unambiguously if rather quietly, the assurance that the modern world affords high and serious subjects for a new poetry" (126). When, though, did the lyrical tradition assert this position in the real world? Don Quixote did not prosper, and epic gestures were surely always recognized as such; real in their way but not "everyday".

Mermin's assertion, like Goode's, and in keeping perhaps with Claude's assertion of the ascendancy of "must" over "will", suggests that Clough's poetry demonstrates that the singular authority of a particular type of language has become obsolete in relation to a more thorough awareness of the essential purpose it serves. That the romantic lyrical tradition which, according to Mermin, is not sustainable alongside the poem's rendition of the everyday, misconstrues the scenario Clough presents. As, for instance, with the comparison Robert Micklus makes in "A Voyage of Juxtapositions: The Dynamic World of *Amours de Voyage*" (*Victorian Poetry*, 18 (1980), 407-14), between lyric and letter, asserting that the contemporary everyday flexibility of the latter succeeds at the expense of the rigid delimitations of the former. Similarly in *Dipsychus* the persuasive success of The Spirit is not an affirmation of the paramount claims of necessity but rather a dramatisation of the fate of idealistic conviction in the absence of a shared or reliable source of authority.

Dipsychus' declaration refers to the same state of "engagement" recommended in The Spirit's encouragement, "Won't you find it pleasant / To own the positive and present / To see yourself like people round / And feel your feet upon the ground" (2.7.81-4). The two statements reflect the impressions allowed by the selective predicates of Dipsychus' and The Spirit's respective terms of argument. While intellectually consenting to the new "law" conveyed by The Spirit, Dipsychus' emotional state reflects his feeling of surrender to chaos.

Clough's Mephistopheles is dealing with a naïve but intelligent individual. Dipsychus' double-mind is formed with a characteristically deft observation and imitation of the inflections of internal dialogue, such as is reflected in Clough's "Thesis and Antithesis", and in many other poems whose fertility is not fully evident in isolation from the complementary "second thoughts" Clough often provides in companion pieces. These alter-images inevitably register the inadequacy of any single authoritative position, making gestures towards the abundance of independently legitimate alternatives that colonise the moral void in the absence of an external authority, and towards the inability of these gestures to sustain any attempt at arrogating the role of a lost authority.

In *Dipsychus Continued*, we see how disappointment with reality has been stored up for Dipsychus through The Spirit's manipulation of Dipsychus' need to feel aligned with unequivocal "good".⁷¹ His ready reversion to the disquiet which his successful worldly career had seemed to resolve reflects the tenuous ability of the real, as of the ideal, to provide absolutely satisfactory blueprints of conduct and purpose. Clough

⁷¹ *Dipsychus Continued* was never finished, it is a short fragment in which a much older Dipsychus (thirty years have passed since Dipsychus submission to The Spirit) appears disillusioned both with the successful legal career and family life which his submission to The Spirit's law of necessity has afforded him (see: "Dipsychus Continued", *The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. F.L. Mulhauser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 294-299). Dipsychus is visited, in his chambers, by a woman from his past. It is implied that in his submission to The Spirit's pandering for necessity, Dipsychus had also relaxed his commitment to resist the casual sexual activity he so clearly hankers for in *Dipsychus*. Though he does not recognise her, the woman who visits Dipsychus tells him they were once lovers and that he fathered her child; she is not blackmailing him or seeking a handout, she merely wants him to acknowledge her. Dipsychus sends her away and starts to confront the callousness and apathy which has been nurtured and normalised through his "idealistic" submission to necessity. When Dipsychus makes the woman leave, she sets a deadline for his last chance to meet her request; the fragment, though, ends before the time arrives. Her role parallels, to some degree, the visitation of Goethe's Faust by the ghost Care. Care challenges Faust to consider the damage his developments have necessitated and the lives he has effected; to consider, in short, the cost of his egocentric commitment to his ideal world. Dipsychus' visitor informs him: "You called me Pleasure once, I now am Guilt" (IV.19). The visitation forces him to reflect on the terms of his bargain with necessity. In so doing he appears to approach the possibility of recognising that the commitment which he had convinced himself he "must" make, merely represented a preference which had been unpalatable and inadmissible to his ideals, but which had nevertheless seduced his desire for certainty and stability.

therein carries out a characteristic interruption of any simple polarisations which his poems might be seen initially to recommend.

Clough's diminished Faust legend does not simply favour the dismissal of metaphysical and abstract questing in favour of a materialistic existence. Exploring Dipsychus' initial preferences, and their erosion by The Spirit's persuasive assertions, Clough's poem ultimately approves neither one nor the other; it reflects rather the process by which temptation, doubt, confusion and desire, establish certainty out of an ambiguous and plentiful chaos of conflicting ideas. Beyond disrupting the traditional quest poem's alignment to higher truths, *Dipsychus* presents a mode of conversation between abstract and contingent realities which exposes the implicit instability of ostensibly absolute convictions distilled from a conceptual horizon lacking a shared external authority.

The Faustian compromise can never deliver the kind of absolute satisfaction which the idealist typically craves. "You drive us into action as our duty. / Then action persecutes and tortures us" ("*Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne*", 104-05⁷²); this regret for an unsatisfactory life of regal duty takes the relationship between dutiful service and living satisfaction for granted. Without the external credibility of the "you" whom this complaint addresses this presumption is one of the "sillier savings" which makes a fool of the present. Where preference and choice are not perceived as sacrifice, compromise or trade, but rather as obedience to an external principle, the expectations that a satisfactory outcome will be dispensed remain. This emotional dimension, on which the idealist mindset unwittingly thrives, maintains a hangover of dissatisfaction in those "new certainties" which, while eschewing the substance of ethics based on external authority, nevertheless pander to the needs it has nurtured.

While bracing himself against the momentum of The Spirit's idealisation of necessity, and at the same time preparing himself to accept its goal, Dipsychus admits, "Draw the line where you will it will exclude / Much it should comprehend" (1.6.81-82). From a purely abstract stance then, there can be no reason to draw such a line. But Dipsychus' conviction in his right to maintain this stance has faded, and contemplating a life among other people he accepts the line must be made. Dipsychus' approval of necessity over the "fancy" his ideals have been reduced to by The Spirit, his dutiful surrender to idealised reality, is in turn denied absolute approval (as representing, for

⁷² Clough, "*Sa Majesté Très Chrétienne*" (1849-50), *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 252-56.

instance, an illuminated triumph over ignorance) and, therefore, the mandate of a certain utility. But the dutiful surrender of his own ideals is not afforded the satisfying certitude stressed by The Spirit in its seductive advocacy of the ideal propriety of a committed approval of convention. What there is of *Dipsychus Continued* suggests Clough's intention to reiterate the perpetual flux in which the self orientates itself to finite morality, and the incompatibility to this flux of narratives that seek their validation in the closure of absolute certainty. Rather than simply reflecting the value of his particular decision in a particular either/or situation, Dipsychus' problematic career is a manifest repercussion of the false polarisation of a naturally ambiguous moral scene, through which the Spirit had compelled his commitment to a worldly existence.

Claude and Dipsychus are unable to verify their own moral and abstract impulses in the terms their idealisms (or their expectations regarding the terms they idealise) make *available* to them. This inability reflects the perpetuation of outmoded standards of truthfulness in which Claude's ideals had previously participated. The potency Claude expects is the potency abstract truths previously exerted as components of a divine equation. However, unto themselves these "truths" are no longer direct evocations of authority and are required to become self-qualifying utilities. Like the sillier savings of Rome the traditional language of abstract idealism makes fools of uncritical modern disciples.

The body of Clough's work coheres as a warning against resolving legitimate sources of uncertainty into a falsely unified authority (thereby obscuring both the largeness of the world and the pitfalls in it). In place of this resolution, Clough's renditions of the ideological scene, *Dipsychus* in particular, encourage the acknowledgment that each decisive approval of an affinity reflects the conscious acceptance of a trade or compromise.⁷³

⁷³ In "Clough's Self-consciousness", *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1969), 253-74), Barbara Hardy celebrates the "tempered feeling" which, she suggests, is characteristic of Clough's work. "Exposed to the temperate reason, and so strengthened, not explained away but not isolated and segregated from critical thought" (268). This tempered feeling is the source of an emotional health and clarity implied particularly by, though not attained in, *Amours* and *Dipsychus*.

CHAPTER 5 - A Dignified Occupation

The problems which transcendent idealisms, whether religious or political, encounter in reality are intertwined with an array of different though fundamentally related problems of thought and conduct. To go into these interconnections to the extent which they warrant well exceeds the possibilities of a single thesis; merely to note their existence, though, would diminish the vitality of the picture I hope to provide. I shall attempt in the following section to convey at least something of the breadth and complexity of the perplexities intermingled with uncertainty of divine authority, and to flesh out some representative particularities.

In the nineteenth century, notions of the autonomy and objective equality of selves were still relatively new (both as a political proposition and as an implication of evolutionary facts), a modern condition around which one could expect acts of encoding, incorporating its necessities and imperatives, to take form. By necessities and imperatives I mean those sentiments or values which mould it into an area of conscious and therefore manifest concern; a subject of aspiration and application; or merely the codifying of the new agenda which it appears to imply into an overt form available for public consumption. These acts occur concurrently with the very manifestations that provoke them. As such they necessarily represent a hybrid image wherein a new experience is recorded and possibly re-experienced in the adapted terms of the old.

In their depictions of individuals deprived of external faith, Clough and Dostoevsky each emphasise these individuals' awareness of their consequent responsibility to organise their own individual moral preferences and self-image *well* (in recognition, for instance, of participating in a moral sphere or discourse that transcends their particularity), alongside the daunting feelings of confusion, inadequacy and stifling caution which this responsibility imposes. The theoretical proposition of a liberation from authority opens up a daunting field of possibilities and choices to the individual. In Dostoevsky's works, in particular, characters deprived of any external guidelines or ideals frequently feel themselves entitled (or are compelled) to maintain a self-image at odds with what the reader can perceive as their actual nature and the limitations of their actual circumstance.

To many intellectuals and idealists the apparent marginalisation of abstract ideals from the realisable directives of modern moral engagement suggested the extinction of a fund of dignifying and unequivocal directives, analogous to a chivalric code. Given the lost sanctity of the social roles which these characters gravitate towards (in particular their disillusion with the church as a worthy vocation), employment and worldly necessities provoke feelings of confrontation, opposition and, typically, superfluity in relation to the interests of their immediate community.

It is significant that the characters on whom I am focusing belong loosely to a class with a strong code of dutiful service which, in Russia, had recently been freed from the regimentation of military career,¹ and in the rest of Europe from an almost

¹ Alexander Herzen, in *Childhood, Youth and Exile* (1852-53), observes a similar opening out of the possibilities and, therefore, the choices and concerns, accompanying education in Russia. In Herzen's youth, idealism was stirring:

The formalism of theological training and Polish indolence had alike disappeared, and had not yet given place to German utilitarianism, which applies culture to the mind, like manure to a field, in the hope of a heavier crop. The best students had ceased to consider learning as a tiresome but indispensable byway to official promotion; and the questions which we discussed had nothing to do with advancement in the Civil service.

Childhood, Youth and Exile (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 94-95.

Herzen's enthusiastic reflections on the freedom to pursue higher learning for its own sake, rather than as the qualifications for a particular career, is paralleled by a more equivocal depiction in the proud declaration of Griboyédov's Chatsky (the titular hero of *Chatsky* or *The Misery of Having a Mind* (1823), *The Government Inspector and Other Russian Plays*, trans. Joshua Cooper (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990), 125-213).

CHATSKY: People can breathe more freely,
There's no rush now to join the regiment of buffoons.
FAMUSOV: The things he says! And so pat with it all!
CHATSKY: To yawn at influential patrons' ceilings,
To be seen and not heard, to kick one's heels, fetch chairs,
To pick up handkerchiefs ...
FAMUSOV: He's on the verge of preaching liberty!
CHATSKY: People who travel, people who live in the country...
FAMUSOV: He doesn't recognize Authority!
CHATSKY: People who work for the job, not to please others...
FAMUSOV: I wouldn't ever have those gentlemen allowed
In gunshot range of Petersburg or Moscow.
Chatsky, Act 2, 149.

In *Chatsky*, the misery of having a mind implicitly involves existing in impotent awareness of the hypocrisy and flattering delusions on which convention maintains the genteel stability of middle class pretension to dignity.

And now suppose that one of us,
That one young man is found who doesn't tout for jobs,
Who hasn't any use for rank and office,
But thirsts for knowledge, set on study;
Or else, suppose the Lord has raised in him a spirit

implicit affiliation with the church. The attitudes and expertise of these individuals are no longer bound to or associated with a particular professional outlet or position in a regulated social structure. Simultaneously, though, outside the avenues conventionally laid out for them these attitudes and this expertise (literacy, abstract critical thought, scepticism, idealism and theoretical reflection, for example) appear of limited pragmatic use.

In addition to the range of choices available to the educated individual, or *theoretically* attainable by them, they face an absence of any authoritative directive through which to fix upon a particular duty or vocation. Idealistic individuals feel themselves required to choose from a variety of alternatives, but cannot recognise, and therefore cannot defer to, any authoritative criteria beyond their desires, preferences or subjective attempts at objectivity.

In relation to the roles favoured by transcendent idealists' notions of dignity and by their implicit tables of virtues, participation in the workaday world often seems a demeaning burden. "We must eat", observes Dipsychus, before solacing himself with the petulant: "Yet I could deem it better too to starve / And die untraitored".² The aversion to the workaday world exhibited by Dipsychus, Claude, and Raskolnikov reflects a tendency among idealistic intellectuals of the period to feel that worldly participation is somehow a betrayal of their better instincts and of their potential to provide their community with more valuable service.³

The apparent necessity of banal drudgery in the workforce, and unresolved concerns over the worthiness of faceless public service propose problems for these characters, problems which are exacerbated by their persisting esteem for abstract and unworldly commitment to an idealised realm of disinterested inquiry.

It is an easier matter for us contemplative creatures,
Us, upon whom the pressure of action is laid so lightly:

Burning for beauty and creative art –
They'll cry at once 'Fire, murder, thieves!'
And he'll get called a dreamer! Dangerous!
Chatsky, Act 2, 157.

With the lesser regimentation of the purposes of higher education, the kind of galling dependency which, for example, makes Goethe's Werther (who is educated but unprovided for) so irascible, is transferred from the patron to the individual's unmediated responsibility to ratify their subjective self-opinion by earning its equivalent worth directly in the theoretically open market of liberal individualism.

² Clough, *Dipsychus*, 2.6.61–62.

³ Similar dilemmas are faced by many of Chekhov's gentlefolk in the waning of the landed classes' privileged and specialised roles in the structure of Russian society.

We discontented indeed with things in particular, idle,
Sickly, complaining, by faith in the vision of things in
general
Manage to hold on our way . . .

(*Amours*, II.xiv.307-311).

Claude and Dipsychus disparage merely worldly pragmatism in deference to what they feel is both an obligation and right to serve a higher order of pragmatism which often requires them to act against their material needs and personal interests. (Dipsychus' suggestion that starvation might be preferable to compromising his ideals through adherence to the necessities of a worldly existence, expresses what would be, in the terms of his ideal, an extreme but nevertheless pragmatic choice⁴). Such disparagements of a disenchanted reality, though, follow a recent history of rhetorical attitudes stressing the theoretical potential (even the right) of any individual, regardless of birth, to engage in actions and attitudes of epic significance.⁵ Dipsychus' disillusion with his employment opportunities is not merely an aversion to tying up papers; it reflects a feeling that he has arbitrarily been denied an opportunity to live his life in deference to anything he could consider a higher purpose.

Aesthetic affinity for the forms and rituals of faith nurtures much in the religious disposition that, while still garnering emotional approval, had been rationally proven obsolete.⁶ Such affinities offer an alluring contrast to the resented reality of an

⁴ Such pragmatism is at the foundation of individuals' commitment to and justifications of doctrines of violent revolution and terrorism as well as of idealistic self-sacrifice. Dipsychus' essentially half-hearted gesture to this kind of commitment to pragmatically doing whatever is necessary to comply with the terms of one's ideal, is pleasantly pliable, pleasantly disposed to compromise, it shows his position in-between the contradictory tides of the absolutist worldview he has inherited and an inchoate awareness of the inadequacy and impracticability of such worldviews.

⁵ Hegel's world historic figure, and his stress on the pro-active role of humans in making rather than merely experiencing the epochal upheavals of history, provides the most striking and influential of such notions. Though Hegel's world-historic figures are proposed as rare and intrinsically superior individuals, the notion that History was subject to the influence of individual wills offers an invitation to think of every individual existence as its own historical project, with the right to will itself into a particular form. As I have also noted, the influence of the democratic principles and philosophical justifications associated with the French Revolution offers a similar justification and even encouragement of ambitious self-improvement. If one is dissatisfied with one's place, these principles imply, one has as much right as any other to act on the world in order to attain the place or rank one feels suited to. This is true, perhaps, but at the same time this right is not one that exonerates any individual of the actions through which they go about remedying their dissatisfaction.

⁶ John Heath-Stubbs, in *The Darkling Plain: A Study of the Later Fortunes of Romanticism in English Poetry from Darley to W.B. Yeats* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950), describes a similar tendency, which he associates with Arnold and Clough, as the mark of the "wistful unbeliever". The wistful unbeliever is "unable to square his intellectual convictions with the traditional faith he has lost, whose passing he continually mourns" (111). Heath-Stubbs goes on, rather troublingly, to assert that this is a

uncertain moral scenario in which one must choose pragmatic methods of serving merely partial ideals, rather than existing in a state of noble acquiescence to a higher power.

Dipsychus' belief in the aristocratic prestige of unworldly spirituality, and his desire for chivalric surrender to service of his ideal, moulds and supports a posture of opposition to everyday conventions and, for him, justifies his disdain for the *savoir-faire* of worldly careerism.

On vile consideration. At the best
With pallid hotbed courtesies to forestall
One's native vernal spontaneities
And waste the priceless moments of the man
In softening down grimace to grace.

(1.4.42-46).

But there is a wider horizon to Dipsychus' position: his arguments, both against worldly commitment and for his own unworldly idealism are surrendered equally to the ritual of rational debate and justification (or semblance thereof) which he enters into with The Spirit. Dipsychus' convictions then, are in a state of fraught equilibrium between two opposed ideologies: he favours one dogma but accepts that he cannot justify it as he would like; consequently, while he argues strongly for the sanctity of his ideals, he remains dutifully open to any system that can rationally and objectively be proven to represent a higher authority.

Dipsychus weighs up his conflicting duties to abstraction and worldly cares in a world that seems newly dominated by inescapable forces of materialism. Unlike Eliot's Prufrock, who wonders, "Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, / Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?",⁷ Dipsychus exists at a point of more direct hostility between the virtues of heroic certainty and the anti-hero's resilient choice of finitude.

sentimental state of mind which, due to its inherently conflicted nature, is incapable of producing good poetry.

⁷ T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (London: Faber & Faber, 1958), 11-15. John Goode has suggested that the comparison of Clough with Eliot is "irrelevant" due to Clough's refusal to grasp after "surviving fragments of tradition in a culturally sterile world" (Goode, "*Amours de Voyage: The Aqueous Poem*", 296). In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the poem typically cited in this comparison, Prufrock's expression of the shifting foundations of certainty and self-expression register the same kind of disorientation, and unreliability of traditional frameworks, that Claude struggles with in *Amours*. Prufrock is perhaps just a little less surprised by the prospect of acknowledging the world to be a place of confusion and indefiniteness.

The age of instinct has, it seems, gone by
And will not be forced back. And to live now
I must sluice out myself into canals
And lose all force in ducts.

(2.3.105-08).

It is a similar sort of sluicing out which leads Dostoevsky's Golyadkin, in *The Double*, into self-division; his desire for success, recognition and approval forces him to pursue lines of behaviour which are incompatible with his esteem for noble ideals of dignified and honourable behaviour; the implicit collaboration of these ostensibly exclusive motives cannot be admitted so Golyadkin splits into two entities to house them separately.

The new types of work on which these characters focus their aversion, are felt to be alien, unplaced and disorienting. Consequently, they are rarely depicted for what they are, but become negative symbols for what is felt to be absent. Raskolnikov's isolation from reality, as I shall discuss later, is due in part to the measure it takes of him and the role it would allow him to play; he is not prepared to witness himself labouring anonymously as a translator or teacher. In *Dipsychus* this hierarchical problem of status is similarly problematic. Dipsychus would rather not sully himself with worldly labour at all, but given that he must, he insists that The Spirit find him work which harmonises with his self-image. However, this trade-off, which is not available to Raskolnikov, of a position of esteem, instigates the kind of transfer of identification and esteem to the worldly position of the ideals it has supplanted which in turn advances it, in spite of its initial stigma, as the sphere of purposeful endeavour. Dipsychus' successful career as a lawyer and upstanding member of his community, in *Dipsychus Continued*, reflects a kind of redirected energy from his repressed ideal (a reactionary affirmation of the negation or denunciation of his ideal).

Dipsychus bemoans the demeaning measures necessitated by the modern occupations that were becoming typical of his social class. Dipsychus observes:

The modern Hotspur
Shrills not his trumpet of To Horse, To Horse,
But consults columns in a railway guide;
A demigod of figures; an Achilles
Of computation -
A verier Mercury express come down
To *do* the world with swift arithmetic.

Dipsychus' discomfort draws on a heritage of noble service and spiritual devotion to deflect the phantoms of the suspicion, to which he anxiously subjects himself, that he is suffering *personally* for the affront to his vanity or self-esteem; he is suffering disinterestedly, he protests, on behalf of a transgressed principle and a problematically unrecognised scruple.⁸

We ask Action,
And dream of arms and conflict; and string up
All self devotion's muscles; and are set
To fold up papers. To what end? We know not.
Other folks do so: it is always done;
And it perhaps is right. And we are paid for it.
For nothing else we can be. He that eats
Must serve; and serve as other servants do:
And don the lacquey's livery of the house.
(2.3.131-39).

This is the reality, and this: "O could I shoot my thought up to the sky / A column of pure shape, for all to observe", is the desire it thwarts.⁹

At the [huge] members of the vast machine
In all these crowded rooms of industry
No individual soul has loftier leave
Than fiddling with a piston or a valve.
(2.3.120-23).

The analogy through which Dipsychus lays out his dissatisfaction is extreme and evocative, but also seems conscientiously to be waiting on any qualifications it might provoke. As he juxtaposes the conventions of epic dignity with the confining banalities of bureaucratic delegation, Dipsychus seems more incredulous than dismissive; he

⁸ The danger inherent in idealism practiced in an unidealistic world, and its susceptibility to manipulation and betrayal, manifest clearly in the disastrous consequences of Jim's fidelity to his idealised moral code which conclude Conrad's *Lord Jim*. Jim's expectation that Gentleman Brown would be compelled to honour his word in the same manner that Jim might, is suspiciously convenient to a passive desire not to sully his own moral conscience by acting with what he considers ungentlemanly ruthlessness. Jim's trust - his adherence to his "shadowy ideal of conduct" - is charged, both in its consequences and through Marlowe's narrative observations, with unwitting self-indulgence, and culpable naïvete and negligence of practical worldly responsibility to other beings (as opposed to his ideal).

⁹ Clough, *Dipsychus*, 2.3.140-41.

accepts the disenchanted world but hesitates at its capacity to support or warrant the kind of absolute commitment he still idealises.

Well one could bear with that; were the end ours,
One's choice and the correlative of the soul.
To drudge were then sweet service.
(2.3.115-17).

Dipsychus puts it to himself whether "By thinking of the leagued fraternity, / And of co-operation, and the effect / Of the great engine", he might become genuinely inspired with a dignifying worldly devotion.¹⁰ This potential consolation is appended, though, and deflated with reservations: what, for instance, if the great machine is merely a treadmill?

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Trying to decide what he feels after being insulted by a soldier, and how to respond without making himself in some way ridiculous, Dipsychus exasperatedly and indignantly declares that the coin of honour has fallen in the dirt. "Pure silver though it be let it rather lie"; the coin has been polluted by banalities of modern living and Dipsychus will not condescend to reinstate it.¹¹ Dipsychus' simile of an irredeemably sullied coin conveys the disruptive intrusiveness, into all points of honour, of the prevalence and ideological promotion of self-interest.¹² Dipsychus implies that where

¹⁰ *Dipsychus*, 2.3.127-29.

¹¹ *Dipsychus*, 1.6.100.

¹² This simile combines a concern for the dignity remaining to a code of conduct which had previously been more directly associated with the virtues of noble birth. In Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, Rameau's Nephew provides one example of the effect of a commodification of the accepted signs and commensurate status of nobility: from being a quality intrinsic to or born into an individual it has become a currency determined by fluctuating standards of social tastes, conventions and values. In Diderot's dialogue, Rameau's Nephew proudly demonstrates to the narrator how he intends to teach his children the dignity and happiness attainable to those in possession of hard currency. Though the power of money to demand esteem regardless of aristocratic status is nothing new, the idea that this power was now attainable by any member of the population (regardless of the rarity of the practical realisation of this idea) was. This idea meant that the rapid progress of the Industrial Revolution was accompanied by the notion that great wealth and power were no longer the special and rightful privilege of a class determined by birth; a notion that allowed class resentments and dissatisfaction to blossom into feelings of entitlement and even obligation to climb to a position of greater material comfort. The practical unlikelihood of fulfilling such "entitlements" and "obligations" meant that the most likely consequence of the possibility of social advancement merely engendered resentful feelings of deprivation and discrimination in society's negligence of the equal essential worth of its citizens.

Dipsychus' analogy for the value of chivalric devotion to unworldly ideals – a coin, lying dirty in the street, which he will not sully himself by retrieving – reflects his fear for the devaluation of immaterial

honour codes are no longer common, one cannot stoop to restore the coin, or reprove an insult against a point of honour, without appearing to react against a merely personal offence or to be acting merely in one's own interests. Dipsychus desires an abstract and therefore impersonal cause, heroic in keeping with his own conception thereof, and sheltered from suspicions of self-interest by the overt surrender of individual conscientiousness to the directives of the cause. This unrequited desire, though, is the only form in which he can maintain this particular notion of honourable action, given his distempered view of the world and his hypersensitivity to the corrupting individualistic pride of idealism.

Dostoevsky's Underground Man, suffering under an alienating awkwardness of sceptical non-conformity and reflective self-consciousness, worries that a billiard-hall crowd "would all deride me if I started protesting and talking to them in literary language. Because among us to this day it is impossible to speak of a point of honor – that is, not honor, but a point of honor (*point d'honneur*) – otherwise than in literary language. In ordinary language there is no mention of a 'point of honor.'"¹³ The Underground Man here expresses a common concern and a genuine limitation experienced by idealists who feel their idealism to be redundant or incomprehensible to a general population who they consider is bound to conformity, convention and pragmatic reality. Abstract honour is conceived as an elite and esoteric discipline which

devotions brought about by the increasingly materialistic values of a community whose strongest bonds and only shared code appear to be the principles upholding a prosperous laissez-faire economy. This circumstance is further apparent in a popular play of the early 1850s, George Henry Lewes' *The Game of Speculation* (*The Lights of London and Other Victorian Plays*, ed. M.R. Booth (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 49-102), which marries a farcical depiction of bourgeois pretence with the contemporary concerns of mid-Victorian business practice.

HAWK: ... How little you know the present age. Now, nothing but selfishness exists. Everyone places his future in the Three-per cents. There lies our paradise. The wife knows her husband is insured; the son insures his father's life. All our morals lie in dividends! As to servants, we change them every day. Attachment, indeed! Pay them their wages regularly, and they leave you without regret; but owe them money, and you keep them devoted to the last.

MRS HAWK: Oh! You, so honourable, you to utter such things?

HAWK: I utter what we all feel, but what few have the boldness to avow. Here lies modern honour. (*Holding up half-a-crown*) Chivalry has shrivelled into that! Shall I tell you why plays succeed which have scoundrels for their heroes? It is because the spectator is flattered, and says to himself as he goes away, 'Come, come, hang it, after all I'm not such a scamp as he is.'

The Game of Speculation, 1.160-74.

Unlike Timon's misanthropy, originating in his disappointment in the fickleness of his fellow men, Hawk speaks with the distempered and accusative hypocrisy of a businessman fallen on financial hard times.

¹³ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear & Linda Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 50.

is of dubious intelligibility and credibility to the broad community. But the Underground Man's fear for the reception of protests based on "points of honour" also reflects an unwillingness to face up to the challenge of this incompatibility, and a suspicion perhaps that the crowd's disregard of such pragmatically meaningless abstractions will strip him of his honourable defence. Without his "beautiful and lofty" abstractions, the Underground Man would be left in their eyes, and his own, as merely a petty irritant and a coward, rationalising his way out of danger. This uncertainty is similarly latent in the various "points of honour" taken up and clung to by individuals seeking to resist intimations of chaos, and trying to establish an order beyond the concrete patterns of their material circumstances.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov and his maid discuss the merits of his commitment to abstract thought:

"A fool she may be, the same as I am, and aren't you a smarty, lying around like a sack and no good to anybody! You say you used to go and teach children before, so why don't you do anything now?"

"I do something..." Raskolnikov said, reluctantly and sternly.

"What do you do?"

"Work ..."

"Which work?"

"I think," he replied seriously, after a pause.

Nastasya simply dissolved in laughter.

...

"And a fat lot of money you've thought up, eh?"¹⁴

Raskolnikov is not simply lazy, if anything he is over-ripe, as we discover later, with stifled potential for committed activity. Like the narrator in "The Meek Girl" his isolation suggests a fastidious act of pride and conscience. Raskolnikov deems the roles available to him as a participant in the world to be unworthy of his character or expertise; he commits himself to this vocational isolation and to abstract thought. The inherently unreal, or abstract, focus of this vocation, though, and the necessarily self-validating affiliation, or faith, which it demands, renders it an inherently unstable, unsupported and anxious occupation.

The posture of stoical or sceptical aloofness, misanthropic or otherwise, widely used to deflect self-awareness of a complicity with life's undignified compromises -

¹⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1993), 29.

vanitas vanitatas – seems to succeed until practical facts, such as the necessity of earning a living, are taken into account. As staples of the English public school and university system in the early nineteenth century, the Classics and the Classical world presented a moral framework which appeared to many a gratifyingly enlightened alternative to the fraught Christian tradition. As well as a moral counterpoint to Christianity, the Classical world held an otherworldly allure for intellectual escapism from “vulgar” forces of modernisation.¹⁵ Unfortunately Dipsychus, like Clough himself, is unable to indulge in the solace of such repose, as he will inevitably have to feed, clothe and house himself. The protestations of a Russian counterpart, Ilya Oblomov (the central figure in Ivan Goncharov’s *Oblomov*¹⁶), as to the worthiness of his stasis in comparison to the perpetual hollow motion of “society”, suggest a hostility to the idealistic delusions that look to validate engagement, preferring an entirely disengaged and interior life of the mind (the implication of evasive self-justification always remains). It is worth bearing in mind the status of some of these cynics. Initially, Ilya Oblomov is independently wealthy; his persistent refusal to participate in base dealings with the practicalities of business and domestic management results in the dwindling of his own fortune (and a complementary boom in that of his bailiff), but in the first place his detached idealism survives untried and untainted because he can afford it. The elder Mr Pitt, of *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), laughing at the vain business of the City, laughing at his maid’s sincere imitation of mannered society, is buoyed (like Timon’s misanthropy) by a firm sense of personal merit which is reliably underwritten by material wealth and independence. The way Pitt laughs at Betty Horrocks reflects the ultimately dismissive cynicism with which he consciously differentiates himself

¹⁵ The classical languages (Greek and Latin; fairly dependable marks of a particular type of privileged education and upbringing) open up postures of dignified dissociation and esoteric qualification providing consolation and solacing notions of serving a higher purpose while serving an implicit protest against an apparently chaotic populism which, to many among the privileged educated elite, seemed to herald the sleep of reason and order. In Virginia Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room* (1922), exploring the reality, and unreality, of the worldviews and ideological affinities of an early Twentieth-Century Cambridge undergraduate, nothing much seems to have changed. The young men exist in a closed world in which their esteemed abstract virtues are mutually affirmed; the classics offer solace from the noisy street. Woolf’s intellectual young men are averse to the modern world, but their alienation and retreat from its dilemmas are ambiguously punctuated by the sudden hostility with which it destroys them. Their alienation seems both justified and culpable in relation to the World War, in which Jacob is killed.

¹⁶ Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov* (1859), trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1954). Oblomov is perhaps one of the earliest representations of the ‘sleepwalking’ gentry, he exists in a state of apathetic indifference to his responsibilities as a landowner, and to the stagnation of his emotional and social existence. He is incapable of looking after himself, having grown up accustomed to servants and valets, and disdainful of any kind of worldly involvement or activity. He is in no ways a malevolent figure but he suggests an emblem of the sneaking damage permitted by abstraction from and negligence of a world beyond the cloistered sphere of his individual comforts.

from the vanity and worthlessness of conventional human behaviour; he proudly dehumanises himself to give his cynicism unilateral licence over human vanity. The manner in which the cynicism of Diderot's professional raconteur, Rameau's Nephew, pragmatically lies dormant, offers an illuminating contrast: the necessity of earning a living *is* justification enough to indulge the hypocrisies and delusions of those with money enough to support him. The overt posture of the malcontent or the uncommitted intellectual, a disregard for hollow convention, is incompatible with the needs of a professional life.

In this regard Dipsychus' reluctance to go amongst ordinary folk as an educated wage-slave (as he sees it) appears symptomatic of his nostalgia for higher holier things. His insistence that should he have to work it must be at something fitting demonstrates his requirement for something that provides the elitist license of a personal distinction in the way Pitt's fortune does. Dipsychus is after all gambling on an eventual inheritance that is the epitome of boom or bust (heaven, hell or oblivion). Ultimately, it is a deficiency in material funds that determines the role into which Dipsychus' residual Christian idealism must evolve, just as Oblomov's and Pitt's financial self-sufficiency determines the ideological postures available to them. Raskolnikov's fate is similarly a reflection of the discrepancy between his abject poverty and the value he places on himself; he will not consent to see himself a flunkey.

The circumstantial link between the cynicism of these characters and their financial security is suggestive: the comforting proportion afforded by abstract idealism (when it implies forestalling commitment rather than escapism) is analogously dependent on being unburdened by human responsibility in a different sense. The childless bachelor uncle looks on real life with a sense of gentle patronising affection, and simultaneously an embarrassed sensitivity to an intuited accusation of a neglected duty to society. In different circumstances, where others are intimately involved, idealism can seem merely a justification for a negligent escapism from responsibilities through a capricious disdain for reality.

For many idealistic individuals, frustrated and sceptical about the possibility of dignified conformity or participation in the world as it is, the security and shared purpose of monastic life - a community of individuals, willingly bound by common surrender to a higher code - often seemed a desirable and attainable idyll. Monastic retreat offered a trope of selfless conviction and conscientious unworldliness which

offered an appealing alternative, if only as an idea, to the compromises necessitated by worldly involvement. In *Amours*, Claude reflects that:

... from the tumult escaping, 'tis pleasant, of drumming
and shouting,
Hither, oblivious awhile, to withdraw, of the fact and the
falsehood,
And amid placid regards and mildly courteous greetings
Yield to the calm and composure and gentle abstraction
that reign o'er
Mild monastic faces in quiet collegiate cloisters.
(III.ix.185-89).

Claude's wistful portrait of tranquillity invokes an atmosphere of straightforward purpose and assurance which, as an idealisation, could apply, for example, equally to the school, or university, as it had the monastery. It is a type of retreat frequently shunned for its surrender of independence, and just as frequently longed for in recognition of the genuine comfort this dependency provides.¹⁷

Directly confronted with the prospect of taking up 'a profession, Dipsychus' salutes to the dignity of walking in God's light become more insistent (the mere wage-

¹⁷ Religious indoctrination trains individuals to respond to the secular world as a situation governed by absolutes; in the absence of this doctrine the imprint of the training remains on those who were ever subject to it. There is an analogous historical moment when the monasteries opened during the renaissance and a population of educated individuals became free to pursue an independent career in the world; the exhilaration as well as the regret for lost security and for overt and authoritative purpose recurs. Referring to this process in *The Tyranny of Progress: Reflections on the Origins of Sociology* (U.S.A.: The Noonday Press, 1955), Albert Salomon observes that:

... many philosophically minded ecclesiastics departed eagerly into the independence of the secular world. Nevertheless, a Petrarch's enthusiasm for the life that lay beyond the walls was apt to be short-lived, for the problem of earning a living forced many of these newly-emerged intellectuals into the service of the princes, whose willingness to support poets and thinkers exacted in return a surrender to a new ministry of thought. The philosophers were hired as propagandists, and their status derived solely from that of their royal employers.

(*The Tyranny of Progress*, 25-26).

At the cost of their own sense of integrity, Salomon continues, intellectuals and scholars survived by providing counsel and indulging the pretensions of those secure in their superiority. This compromised freedom generated a certain nostalgia for monastic rigidity of purpose; Salomon cites Rabelais' depiction of the Abbes de Theleme in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. There is an interesting parallel in the kind of intellectual liberation, including an effective detachment both from religious employment in England (and Europe) and from military service in Russia (and later from employment paths laid down by seminarian studies), experienced by the nineteenth century malcontents and intellectual idealists. And in a cycle of liberation and disillusion, nostalgia for the certainty, the transparent proprieties and the moral support of conservative adherence to convention, often follow. Later in his life Clough, for example, experienced

labour that beckons in place of spiritual vocation sharpens his appetite for higher service). Like many of his contemporaries (Carlyle, for example¹⁸), Dipsychus would really rather believe - belief offers him a more desirable and more morally comfortable life - but is galled by an intellectual responsibility not to.

For many educated individuals of the period, steeped in the values of a religion they could no longer faithfully serve and averse to worldly professions, the desire for a vocation through which they might transcend mere self-interest began to seem unrequitable. Resignation to a hollow "trudging service", in which the ends and rewards seemed little more than provisions for material needs and desires, seemed unavoidable.¹⁹ In 1853 Clough wrote from America:

I really am very comfortably settled ... and have nothing to complain of, except perhaps the fact which appears to be true everywhere, that to get a livelihood one must do work according to other people's fancies, instead of one's own, which of course are the best, but under the circumstances must give way.²⁰

Like Dipsychus, Clough's right to remain true to his "fancies" was curtailed by the necessity, exacerbated in his case by his responsibilities to his fiancée, of making a living.²¹

In the dilemma of the self as career individual among a fabric that depends on its collaboration, duty to society and duty to the essence rather than the form of the purportedly abstract truths which allegedly guide it can be seen to diverge.

wistful longings for the vocation from which his exclusion from the professional university system, brought about by his refusal to sign the 39 Articles, had effectively exiled him.

¹⁸ A.N. Wilson's *God's Funeral* (London: Abacus, 2000) provides an extensive discussion of the various personal struggles with doubt and faith (and science), of a wide range of intellectual, literary and religious figures throughout the nineteenth century.

¹⁹ For a fuller discussion of Clough's conception of "trudging service" see R.A. Forsyth's "Trudging Service - secularization and the 'devotional pseudo-religion' of Arthur Hugh Clough", *The Durham University Journal*, 83 (1991), 27-38. Forsyth's title draws on Dipsychus' meditation on the imperative of those who would live in accordance with Christian ideals to "trudge it", while relinquishing the expectation of any external guidance or affirmation, and the consoling notion of working in direct collaboration with God.

²⁰ Clough, *Prose Remains of Arthur Hugh Clough*, 211.

²¹ Both Clough and Arnold were representative of an increasing reliance among writers and intellectuals on employment among "a growing bureaucracy of civil servants and government employees" (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry*, 167). After his refusal to profess orthodox faith - Clough refused to subscribe to the XXXIX Articles, a pledge of Christian belief which was mandatory for Oxford dons - cut him off from the possibility of earning a living as a teacher and academic, Clough worked in the

So may the ear,
Hearing, not hear,
Though drums do roll, and pipes and cymbals ring;
So the bare conscience of the better thing
Unfelt, unseen, unimaged, all unknown,
May fix the entranced soul 'mid multitudes alone.
("Why should I say I see the things I see not", 54-59).²²

In keeping with the paradoxical hear and not hear, wherein the acknowledgment of one implies the disregard of the other, each music has legitimate claims but each is simultaneously dubious as a singular ethic. Clough's final image though, is of an individual arrested amid the dance by the inkling of an intuited "better thing". In the first stanza the disruption depicted by such arrested motion –

he that stops I' the dance shall be spurned by the dancers' feet, -
Shall be shoved and be twisted by all he shall meet,
And shall raise up an outcry and rout
(ln.7-9).

- is attended by a cautionary admonition not to "forfeit" the "fair chance" of participating in life.²³ It remains for the as yet uninspired individual to "keep amid the throng, / And turn as they shall turn, and bound as they are bounding".²⁴

At the conclusion of the poem, however, disruption seems to have been justified in spite of the risk of isolation, by virtue of its optimistic fidelity to the spectre of the "better thing". As with Turgenev's *Dmitri Rudin*, the idealistic posture is struck as ever, but the context remains one of relativism and individualist fidelity to the purity of the self. In *The Bothie, Amours* and *Dipsychus*, such fidelity is revealed as a factitious scruple generated around the same kind of seduction as the notion of productive social duty.

To those who believe that absolute rational justifications for conviction or belief do not exist, the appearance of belief or conviction in others may suggest hypocrisy, delusion, or the consequence of strategic persuasion.

Education Office, while Arnold, after serving as a secretary to Lord Lansdowne, was employed as an Inspector of Schools.

²² Clough, "Why should I say I see the things I see not", *Clough - Selected Poems*, ed. J.P. Phelan (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 40-42.

²³ "Why should I say . . .", ln. 22.

Go to church – the world require you,
 To balls – the world require you too,
 And marry – papa and mama desire you,
 And your sisters and schoolfellows do.
 Duty, 'tis to take on trust
 What things are good, and right, and just . . .
 “Duty – that’s to say complying”, 14-20.²⁵

Clough’s poems denounce spontaneous duty to convention for its obliviousness to the “Moral blank, and moral void” to which it deludedly looks for external justification.²⁶ Such conformity represents “the blind non-recognition / Either of goodness, truth, or beauty, / Except by precept and submission”.²⁷ In the isolating devotion to essential meanings, though, there is a similar wrongheaded overscrupulousness such as the youthful Cain, in Clough’s *Adam and Eve*, is advised against by his resiliently sceptical father. In “Why should I say I see the things I see not?”, the validity of conscientious objection to dutiful compliance is contrasted to the “coward acquiescence” of uncritical conformity. The poem adumbrates the disdain of Phillip Hewson, in *The Bothie*, for a kind of moral obedience that gives no thought to the rationale which every propriety represents. That there *are* reasons behind these proprieties is, therefore, implied. The kind of moral consciousness that merely observes the form (the quicker to enter the game) rather than fuses with the essence of morality, however, reflects a different kind of moral character. Clough’s dismissive caricature of the mindless observance of social norms is on a direct reactionary scale with his sense of the hostility which such observance directs towards critical activity.

‘Tis the stern and prompt suppressing,
 As an obvious deadly sin,
 All the questing and the guessing
 Of the soul’s own soul within
 (“Duty – that’s to say complying”, 27-30):

Or so it seems to the isolated voice.

The limited scope available to the singular voice of the poet, even when it appears to express Clough’s own views, becomes less satisfactory as his intuitions of the

²⁴ “Why should I say . . .”, ln. 25-26.

²⁵ Clough, “Duty – that’s to say complying”, *Clough - Selected Poems*, 42-43.

²⁶ “Duty - that's to say complying”, 39.

²⁷ “Duty - that's to say complying”, 36-38.

multifaceted and mercurial characteristics of truth begin to emerge. Hence Clough's habitual poetic rejoinders to his own poems; the alternative parts which particularise all his works as contingent human utterances rather than definitive reflections of beliefs and truths. Clough's ability and commitment to insinuate a similar contingency (without disparaging the particularity it implies) into the array of possible convictions and certainties amongst which the characters of his major poems move, is based on a familiarity and indulgence similar to the avuncular concern from which Dostoevsky offers *Crime and Punishment* as a warning to "all our little girls and boys". Again, Clough's own ideological ambivalence allows an even-handed depiction of secular culture, more like the courtly sophistication of Stendhal's comic acuity in both *Scarlet and Black* and *The Charterhouse of Parma*, than the urgent reactionary realism through which Dostoevsky seeks to repudiate and arrest the sway of secular ideology.

Both Clough's and Dostoevsky's individualistic idealists inherit from Christianity a kind of aristocratic convention dictating the prestige and worthiness of fidelity to transcendent moral codes, while simultaneously facing what seem to them demeaning careers as, at best, intellectual wage-labourers. The quixotic fidelity to ideals that attracts them often provokes conflict with, and jeopardises the necessities of, making a living (such idealism is a luxury, and a liability, therefore, for those who cannot afford it). Absolute devotion to an ideal requires that individuals grant themselves the right, tacitly or otherwise, to avoid obligations to others that conflict with devotion to their ideal. Where this luxury of social detachment (an absence of responsibility) is not available, the rigorous idealist is forced to claim or steal it from others, through neglect or denial of worldly responsibilities.

To an extent, Raskolnikov's crime is engendered through his desire to claim this luxury. It is a privilege he feels intrinsically entitled to, in spite of reality's refusal to value and recompense him in accordance with his measure of his own worth. The first step of the unique career Raskolnikov demands for himself is not financial independence, but reality's approval of his right to exist in a privileged relationship with a higher authority.

Raskolnikov, like the pawnbroker in "The Meek Girl", or Mr Jones in Conrad's *Victory*, exhibits indolent objection and resentful hostility to a world he considers has denied him his rightful rank. Raskolnikov refuses to surrender (again like the pawnbroker and Mr Jones) to what he feels to be the indignity of witnessing himself as

a wage-labourer in the everyday world. But unlike Jones and the pawnbroker (both of whom are gentlemen in exile from the dignity and privilege of their original social sphere), Raskolnikov's notion of his insulted nobility is based solely on his recourse to the abstract consolations of intellectual idealism and his faith in their veracity. Because he thinks his theories are true (which is natural given that they answer exactly the problem he finds in his relationship to the world), he imagines he sees further, knows better, *is* better than others.²⁸

In one of four Petersburg *feuilletons* of the late 1840s, Dostoevsky writes:

When a man is dissatisfied, when he has not the means to show what is best in him, to express himself fully ... he at once gets involved in some quite incredible situation; he either takes to the bottle ... or becomes a gambler ... or a rabid duellist; or goes crazy because of such a silly thing as arrogance^[29] while at the same time despising arrogance in his heart and even resenting the fact that he had to get into trouble because of such a silly thing as arrogance.³⁰

At this early stage in his career, Dostoevsky's preoccupation with arrogance and ambition manifests most strikingly in *The Double*. In Dostoevsky's later work the circumstances of Mr Golyadkin's identity crisis reappear in more naturalistic depictions of the imposition of social reality on the ideal self-image. The distorted pride and fixated scheming of Ganya Ivolgin, Ippolit Terentyev and Arkady Dolgoruky all suggest further exploration of a symptom Dostoevsky felt he had failed to fully articulate in *The Double*.

For Dostoevsky, the oppression of what is best in a person by a materialistic society encourages the supplanting of emotional and psychological bonds of community with the independent and isolating self-reliance of material power (whether financial or hierarchical). This compensating force becomes a pervasive answer to the anxiety over the dissolution of a common higher ideal. This is evident throughout *The Double*, in which Golyadkin compulsively yet strategically deploys his money to convince himself of a power and standing that accords with a level of self-esteem he is unable to

²⁸ As I shall discuss later, it might also be said that *because* Raskolnikov *wants* to believe that he sees further, knows better and is better than others, he is forced to try to prove to himself that his theory, in spite of evidence to the contrary, represents an authoritative general rule capable of supporting his actions.

²⁹ Joseph Frank, in *Dostoevsky - The Seeds of Revolt, 1821-1849* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), translates this word as "ambition" and notes that the Russian word "*ambitsia*" is not as neutral as the English term "ambition"; it denotes a "pejorative sense of self-love, pride, and arrogance" (232).

experience beyond his solipsism. The Underground Man has a similar relationship with money, and with the exception perhaps of *Demons*, the problematic intrusion of monetary concerns into human emotional interrelationships can be found close to the heart of all Dostoevsky's major novels. An example from *The Idiot* will serve to convey the kind of distorted human relations Dostoevsky associated with the promotion of individualistic material concerns into the special status and moral role of abstract ideals.³¹

Nastasya Filippovna's celebrations (*The Idiot*, Part 1, ch.13-16³²) culminate with Nastasya bringing to a head the issue of her brokered marriage to Ganya Ivolgin. Ganya works for General Yepanchin who is in league with Totsky, a member of the gentry who adopted the orphaned Nastasya as a child and kept her on a secluded country estate as his mistress. Totsky wishes to marry and needs to placate Nastasya (she has already scuttled a previous engagement with a threat to expose Totsky's debauchery). General Yepanchin and Totsky aim to have Ganya marry Nastasya in order to diffuse the heat of her spite, thereby facilitating Totsky's wedding to one of the General's daughters. Ganya, however, despises Nastasya and is involved in an ambiguous relationship with Aglaya, the General's youngest daughter; he is, therefore, to be paid for his sacrifice. To add to the mercantile atmosphere of property under auction, Rogozhin enters with a late and higher bid for Nastasya's hand. In the denouement of these proposed transactions Nastasya confronts all parties with the naked truth of their mutual situation: hard cash and commodification. Throwing Rogozhin's hundred thousand on the fire

³⁰ Dostoevsky, "Essay IV, June 1847", *Dostoevsky's Occasional Writings*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Vision Press, 1963), 33.

³¹ Georg Lukács suggests, in "Dostoevsky" (*Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. René Wellek (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 146-58), that Dostoevsky's characters reflect conditions symptomatic of the "moral and psychic deformation of man", which the "evolution of capitalism" engendered (156). For Lukács, their fearless submission to "the socially necessary self-distortion", and "their self-dissolution, their self-execution" constitutes dignifying martyrdom, and "the most violent protest that could have been made against the organization of life in that time" (156). Lukács' attribution of blame here depends on a conviction of the existence of a proper form which capitalism has perverted. This conviction is necessary also for Lukács' assertion that the distortions and dissolution which the idealisms of Dostoevsky's characters undergo in the characters' compromises with material self-interest, reflect their author's intention to convey, in their anguished disapproval of reality (which after all opposes the ideal their interests suggest to them), a conscious protest against the necessity of submission to a merely materialistic social structure. Dostoevsky's protests, though, are levelled primarily at the dearth of faith, the weak individualism, that leads these characters into this submission and allows immediate and materialistic interests to dominate the substructure of social convention. Had Lukács been writing of Dipsychus, who submits while nurturing intentions of a deferred rebellion, this suggestion would seem more fitting: it participates in the same kind of hierarchical opposition of idealism and reality to which Dipsychus pins his hopes while nevertheless submitting to the lower path of pragmatic realism.

³² Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (1868), trans. Alan Myers (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

(thereby accepting his bid and depriving Ganya of the seventy five thousand roubles from Totsky) she invites Ganya to pick the money from the flames and make good his loss. Ganya is singled out as the focus of this symbolic challenge, he is the vulnerable aspirant; his service to his 'idea' is condensed into the indignity of clutching a fortune from the fire. Nastasya Filippovna effectively sells herself to purchase the privilege of luxuriating in the exposed indignity of Ganya's greed, and therein orchestrating a personal triumph over the charade of moral decency by which she feels herself to be irredeemably owned. Nastasya relishes the punishment all the more for her own impotence in the midst of these market forces, she can deplore but not resist them.

CHAPTER 6 – Passionate Intensities

... I am a child of the century, a child of disbelief and doubt, I am that to day and (I know it) will remain so until the grave. How much terrible torture this thirst for faith has cost me, and costs me even now, which is all the stronger in my soul the more arguments I can find against it.

Dostoevsky to Mme Fonvizina - Feb 20, 1854.¹

Foreword

In the following chapters I shall explore Dostoevsky's engagement with the assurance and guidance which, in his opinion, people naturally demand from 'ideals'. I shall firstly explore, particularly in relation to Prince Myshkin of *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky's depictions of the nature and effect of the discrepancies which emerge between this 'natural' need and the actual roles ideals can play in a secular and increasingly individualistic culture. Having explored some of the motivations behind Dostoevsky's depiction of secular idealism and of the spiritual and social confusions that generated, in many, a thirst for new ideals and authorities, I shall focus on his depiction, in *Notes from Underground*, of how sceptical individualism can isolate individuals from any vital moral code or purpose. The Underground Man can recognise or conceive of no grand idea for which individual appetites and comforts might be foregone; left to ourselves, he suggests, "we won't know what to join, what to hold to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise".² With nothing to provide grounds on which to recognise or pursue the kind of higher purpose which he nevertheless yearns for (with a disappointed spitefulness), he becomes dependent on the hollow but satisfyingly straightforward structures of conduct and approbation gleaned, ready-made, from aestheticised depictions of life and reality.

I shall then discuss Raskolnikov's relationship with the notion of transcendent ideals, and the way in which the theoretical rationalisations that this relationship allows for (and even nurtures) are affected by his attempts to justify his moral rebellion to others and by his wranglings with the *moral* implications of the unsuspected and

¹ Quoted in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Years of Ordeal, 1850-1859* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 160. Frank cites the letter "Pisma, 1:142", (*Dostoevsky...*, 310), which refers to the Russian edition of Dostoevsky's complete correspondence: "F.M. Dostoevsky, *Pisma*, ed. and annotated by A.S. Dolinin, 4 vols. (Moscow, 1928-1959)" (*Dostoevsky...*, 305).

² Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky; 1993 (New York: Vintage Classics, 1994), 130.

unexpected feelings provoked by his crime. I shall suggest that Raskolnikov ultimately discovers a source of compelling moral information available through interaction with others; his desire for support and understanding and his capacity to recognise and condemn transgressions (his own and others) reawaken him to the reality of the moral bonds which, chafing him, he had sought to disprove.³

When I call Dostoevsky a reactionary, particularly in relation to his religious faith, I do not mean to imply that he reacts against secularization and modernization from a position of convinced Christian faith but rather that his affirmations of Christianity are reactions against his own internal dividedness. He is divided between a vision of the world as it is and a vision of the world as he feels it ought to be. He reacts against the manifest uncertainties and injustices of the actual world, which he cannot deny, through paradoxical assertions of faith in the reality of a world these problems merely eclipse; but the division which prompts this reactionary assertiveness persistently resurfaces.

Dostoevsky's affirmations of Christianity express a commitment to the necessity of a transcendent authority as the foundation of human moral codes. This 'commitment' enjoys neither the consolation nor peace of mind provided unquestioning, blind, or 'true' faith. If at times I seem to overemphasise the reactionary elements of Dostoevsky's affirmation of divine authority, and to under-emphasise his dividedness between faith and a scepticism in the efficacy and credibility of the Christian worldview, it is due to my focus on the manner in which Dostoevsky, in his writing, attempts to convey some inherent dangers of sceptical unbelief and moral ambiguity, and to suggest (as much in hope as conviction) that these dangers can be tolerably avoided through a return to the authority of Christian moral traditions. Dostoevsky's

³ I would note at this point a common feature of such experimental or theoretical acts of deliberate transgression or the dissolution of conventional moral boundaries, that Raskolnikov's own categories of a successful jump to a higher moral category are thoroughly determined by the terms and preconceptions instilled in him by that verystate he aims to prove the factitiousness of. This feature is common to the amoral or nihilistic systems and protests of the vast majority not only of Dostoevsky's radicals but of many of their peers in works concerned with similar moral circumstances. Individuals' commitments to denounce the hollow contingencies of conventional morality are often galvanised by an urge to travesty the limits any social or democratic moral convention must necessarily impose on some aspects of individuals' 'right' to be themselves. This galvanisation is often emphasised in depictions of such figures which intend to show both the rational inconsistencies and the pragmatic insensitivity which underlie the justifications given for such commitments. Dostoevsky provides a clear example of this kind of conflict in an episode in *The Idiot* in which a group of young nihilists, who have been announced before their arrival as having gone further even than the nihilists – denying *all* rights – arrive in Myshkin's home and begin to assert their case that Burdovsky's 'rights' have been wrongly overlooked and that he deserves, *ie.* is *entitled* to, compensation. The particulars of this exchange are complex but the general implication Dostoevsky lends to this episode is that the denial of moral categories serves this group as a platform from which they can flout convention in order to demand that a broader social group recognise their particular perceptions of its moral responsibility to them and grant them their 'moral' rights. In this case, their dissatisfaction is not with an essential concept of morality, but rather with the particular types of groups and individuals which, to them, the conventional moral order appears to favour.

reactionary seeming stance reflects, it seems to me, a compulsive binding of himself to God, as if to a mast, to counter undeniable intimations of humanity's isolation from moral absolutes.

The unambiguous moral conclusions Dostoevsky attempts to elicit from the often intractable moral dilemmas his novels dramatise, rather than reflecting his own possession of such certainty and conviction, reflect his commitment to evoking a reality in which such certainty *is* credible; these conclusions are a part of his performance of conviction which his own doubts demand of him.

Idealistic Activity

In Dostoevsky's work, commonly accepted tradition (or convention) and individuals are repeatedly brought into opposition as a consequences of the idea that absolute truths and unimpeachable moral guidelines can be discovered or constructed through the rational awareness of an independent human mind. This kind of positivism typically provokes its own repudiation, implicit, for example, in the inevitable failure of individuals' attempts to validate internal images of reality as a key to external reality.

In "A Lie is Saved by a Lie" (1877), an article for *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky deems *Don Quixote* the "saddest of all books", conveying "the most profound and fateful mystery of humans and humankind".⁴

... humanity's most sublime beauty, its most sublime purity, chastity, forthrightness, gentleness, courage, and, finally, its most sublime intellect – all these often (alas, all too often) come to naught, pass without benefit to humanity, and even become an object of humanity's derision simply because all these most noble and precious gifts with which a person is often endowed lack but the very last gift – that of *genius* to put all this power to work and to direct it along a path of action that is truthful, not fantastic and insane, so as to work for the benefit of humanity!⁵

Even in this diagnosis it seems that at the mention of "the very last gift", Dostoevsky turns from events and actual people to gesture allusively to a nebulous, inchoate ideal.

In an attempt to concretely express abstract absolute values, idealists (in the sense I am discussing) depend on terminologies (and the attitudes which support them, geared

⁴ Dostoevsky, "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", *A Writer's Diary - Volume II, 1877-1881*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (London: Quartet Books, 1995), 1127-31, 1129. Furthermore, in his notebook Dostoevsky asks himself: "What is more full of despair than Don Quixote" (*The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-81)*, Volume II, trans. Arline Boyer and Carl Proffer, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1975), 145).

⁵ "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", 1129.

to patterns of absolute permission, duty, right and wrong) which ostensibly objectify what are essentially expressions of their particular dissatisfaction and desires. To their own minds, they are thereby able to express and reify a position where no actual common co-ordinates or approved values exist, and, to their own mind, to give it a fixity beyond mere subjective assertion. The nature of these individuals' idealistic expressions convey, and often privilege, the particular moral framework against which they evaluate or monitor the "moral" implications of their self-images and social positions (their entitlements and obligations, that is, as determined by 'moral' terms, generalised from their personal ideals and idealised self-image). Such ideals determine, therefore, what qualities will confer the feeling of leading a good or bad existence. But this feeling is not generated by a simple relationship of disinterested deduction, it involves a *desire* to be satisfied with oneself which interferes with the standards by which this satisfaction is judged.

Dostoevsky invests great value in the idealistic urges and considerations of his characters, but readily allows these urges to evoke bitter recriminations when individuals translate them into authoritative ideological programs or systems. The inevitable contortions and compromises which this translation involves brings about the unwitting corruption of individuals' essential ideal. Individuals who would express or reify their ideals are required to translate them from a solipsistic sphere in which they seem cogent, though intrinsically incomplete or unsystematic, utterances of humble optimism, and to forge them into the prosaic assertions on which their wider credibility, the possibility of understanding or approval, then becomes anxiously contingent. For Dostoevsky the initial idealistic urges, the spontaneous optimistic commitments to the notion of higher truth, adumbrate (or perhaps induce) faith, but in individuals' attempts to consecrate them as serviceable and persuasive templates of transcendent meaning their commitment to higher truth transforms into foolish charades with potentially crippling consequences.

... these people, at the fateful moment, were unable to discern the true sense of things and so discover their *new word* – this spectacle of the needless ruination of such great and noble forces actually may reduce a friend of humanity to despair, evoke not laughter but bitter tears and sour his heart, hitherto pure and believing, with doubt⁶

⁶ "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", 1129.

The discord between scene and character which is generated by radical idealistic activism in Dostoevsky's work - whether like Raskolnikov's selfish revolt or, in *The Idiot*, Myshkin's selflessness - reveals his commitment to communicate particular shortcomings of this reality, while at the same time approving the capacity of the general currents of reality to cultivate the cloistered inspiration of individuals.

In the final book of *The Idiot*, the intolerable hopelessness of Myshkin's abstracted altruism becomes fully manifest. The compromising worldliness and inertia that have taken hold of Myshkin frame a dilemma over the value of fidelity to either the practical or the theoretical credibility of idealistic protest. In dramatising the dilemma of an idealism that pollutes its own ideal in the course of translating its principles into realities, while simultaneously privileging the essential idealistic impulse which generates this dilemma, Dostoevsky relies on his readers' approval of a sublime irony, similar to that which he felt was so intrinsic to the paradoxical triumph he perceived in Don Quixote's ill-fated challenges to the ambivalence of the external world. *The Idiot's* penultimate chapter, centring on Nastasya's corpse, declares the literal failure of Myshkin's potential, the image of this failure is transformed, though, into a tableau which, admitting the absurdity and ostensible futility of Myshkin's altruistic idealism, nevertheless extols a paradoxically resilient devotion to the impulse at its core. In spite of his inability to convey his 'truth', the final chapter (relating the aftermath of Myshkin's stay) establishes that the gestures and tone of his attempts at least evoked understanding of the *kind* of selfless idealism he was trying to convey.

In "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", Dostoevsky explains that when the absolute authority of an individual's 'truth' is challenged the individual faces a crisis: "if there is one lie, then it is all a lie".⁷ Rather than accept this, the individual would rather save the idea on which they have become ideologically dependent, and so, "to save the truth", the devotee "invents another fantasy" to disprove the initial lie.⁸ This is how the overt credibility of a 'truth' is saved. In *The Idiot*, though, the credibility of Myshkin's failed ideal seems to be saved with a mute anguish that eschews "another fantasy" out of strict fidelity to the natural trajectory of secular and emotive idealism.

Myshkin's struggle to maintain and communicate his idealism while attending to the conventions of bourgeois eloquence, the friction between ideal intuitions and concrete expression, is emphasised by Dostoevsky to convey the essential poverty of

⁷ "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", 1130.

⁸ "A Lie is Saved by a Lie", 1130.

Myshkin's profane and inherently misconceived absolutism.⁹ That Myshkin's ideal is benevolent and estimable serves to accentuate the stagnant and corrosive separateness on which individual inspiration necessarily depends to sustain its posture of absolute authority; it is this necessary separateness which disrupts, even in an ethic that advocates communion, the possibility of critical or flexible communication and agreement.

Myshkin's need to communicate the potential of his compassion (as an abstract law, 'true' beyond his own merely immediate and particular demonstrations) involves him in attempts to establish a framework of communication, which jeopardise his own faith in the authority of his guiding idea. In trying to maintain his conviction that beauty will save the world, and to express and justify this conviction in reality's terms, Myshkin discovers the tentative and experimental quality of his ideal. In his nebulous and unsuccessful attempts to communicate his faith, Myshkin begins to recognise the subjectivity and particularity of its foundations.

Dostoevsky's idealists desire to see their internal visions as gestures towards external meanings. The eagerness for conviction which accompanies this desire necessitates the typically selective perceptions through which they enable themselves to recognise their particular propositions approved in the external world. They colonise the world with particular intuitions of significance and, in their eagerness to feel at home in the world, seek to ensure a general approval for these personal worldviews. In so doing the earnest scrupulousness with which they seek to justify their dependence on their solipsistic visions of absolute conviction is corrupted by habitual evasions.

Myshkin attributes the fanatical nihilism manifesting among elements of Russia's youth to their desire, having been deprived by their historic circumstance of the possibility of an orthodox religious faith, to claim for themselves an equivalent conceptual 'home'.

Throughout his work Dostoevsky seems to suggest, similarly, that secular idealism can only be a symptom of a confusing and directionless disappointment, never a cure for it. The ambiguities of human moral and idealistic impulses are plain to him,

⁹ The capacity and tendency of abstract idealists to translate personal or particular desires and deprivations into a general scheme of reform implies an inability to keep in mind the particularity of these desires and the determining influence of the circumstance in which they arise. Both tendencies rely on individuals' desires to generalise, forming broad explanations which do not require further equivocation or concern for residual ambiguities. Prince Myshkin, in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, encodes his personal experiences of circumstantial assurances and personal happiness as revelations of a path towards absolute solace. In this manner, he loses track of the personal contingencies which had generated the particular impact and meaning of these assurances, consequently the personal aspects are effaced and the original and essential substance of his assurances is only elliptically present in the ostensibly absolute principles he tries to convey to others.

and thoroughly evoked in his work. But these ambiguities are ultimately inadmissible as neutral facts, they are offered instead as evidence implicating a type of moral reprehensibility in the reality he depicts, a reprehensibility that calls out for the rehabilitating influence of divine life-goals and moral dictates. Dostoevsky's realism is ultimately an aesthetic tool of complex and often conflicted rhetorical purpose; it is never realism for realism's sake (or naturalism) but a means of justifying authorial interpretations of reality (sometimes subtle, sometimes less so), and ascribing to them the status of ambivalent fact rather than personal preference. The complexity and conflict arise through Dostoevsky's implicit interest in this end: he too requires his necessary truths to appear as rationally deduced empirical realities. The focus of this propaganda, though, is necessarily absent, and in the chaotic consequences its fundamental necessity is asserted. Dostoevsky's distempered realism seems to provide an avenue in which the full range of his scepticism can be expressed in an impersonal fashion, a cathartic and cautionary experiment in which he animates all his worst fears and most pessimistic interpretations of ambiguous realities.

In "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party" (1876),¹⁰ Dostoevsky tells a story of a small boy freezing at Christmas. He admits he made it up but keeps "imagining that it really happened somewhere".¹¹ The boy's mother has just died. He is alone and destitute, and while he freezes to death in the street, Jesus appears and invites him to his Christmas party, after which the boy dies happy. "So why did I make up a story like that" - precisely because he keeps imagining the reality it alludes to, and the neglect of important moral obligations which it reflects.¹² Repeatedly Dostoevsky's work asks, 'can we accept that this is simply ambivalent fact? It is too terrible. Therefore, if only the idea of God can guarantee a moral code that transcends self-interest, humanity *must* deify this idea'. Dostoevsky in this sense combines the capacity to propose the extreme consequences of god's death with an affirmation of the cult of meekness Nietzsche attacked as the insidious foundation of Christianity. Ivan Karamazov asks a similar question to justify his hostility to the idea of a divine author; his lack of faith allows him to logically conclude that a God that approves the world as Ivan perceives it does not deserve human approval. For Dostoevsky, the extremes of this paradox provide an ever more compelling ground for faith; as the death of god becomes more apparent in the

¹⁰ Dostoevsky, "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party", *A Writer's Diary - Volume I, 1873-1876*, trans. Kenneth Lantz (London: Quartet Books, 1994), 310-14.

¹¹ "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party", 310.

¹² "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party", 314.

world around him, his protestations of the importance of faith become proportionately more insistent. Dostoevsky wrote in *A Writer's Diary*:

In "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), a "moment" of clarity changes the dreamer's way of seeing; it doesn't change the world, but he does experience a typically epiphanic acuity: scales fall and what he now feels to be a true perspective of his world is attained. The Ridiculous Man's dream leaves him with no particular vision for a new order or harmony, the particulars of his dreamed paradise were incomprehensible, but he now sees reality as the travesty of an ideal, and his repulsion is motivation enough to change the way he relates to this travesty. This is based on a program or method in which the ideal manifests as a prompt to activity (compelling the individual to dispel or discredit whatever eclipses it). However, the ridiculous man's proportion now includes the ideal's formative environment - a reality from which it is absent - as the context in which active fidelity to the ideal necessarily exerts itself. "That's what we need to fight against! And I shall. If only we all want it, everything will be arranged at once".¹³ The extrapolation of corruptions evident in the actual world, which had previously fuelled a cynical disdain for idealistic postures, galvanises the dreamer's resolve to eschew any complicity with incipient chaos by acting "idealistically" in a protest (which against an abstract scale of general revolution seems futile, but in its limited and immediate context is indisputably benevolent) against the seeming unreality and impossibility of idealistic selflessness: "And I've found that little girl.... And I shall go on! Yes, I shall go on!".¹⁴

In the body of this particular dreamer's reflections, the interaction of self-awareness and critical reflection on the consequences of dreamed life establishes a new perspective that is not wholly contained within the aesthetic of dreaming.

¹³ Dostoevsky, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", *A Writer's Diary - Volume II, 1877-1881*, 960-61.

¹⁴ "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", 961. A similar indirect validation of what is in some ways the absurdity of idealistic and abstract investments in the otherwise brute reality of a meaningless fall from cradle to grave charges the close of Beckett's *The Unnamable* (*Molloy / Malone Dies / The Unnamable* (London: Calder Publications, 1994), 293-418). As the narrator struggles to comprehend or place the moment of his death (wherein the obligation to keep saying words gives way to justified silence), and the point of his struggles at such a moment, the narrative's closing words, "where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on", attest to a strained but persistent resilience of intention (to make sense) that resolves the stumbling uncertainty of purpose or meaning that overtly, or literally, dominate the novel (*Molloy / Malone Dies / The Unnamable*, 418). In Richard Pevear and Linda Volokhonsky's translation of "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (*The Eternal Husband and Other Stories* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000), 296-319), the direct resonance between these two assertions is lost: "And I'll go! I'll go!" ("The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", 319). Nevertheless, in both translations the thematic sympathy - the consciously defiant assertion of what seems a hopeless optimism - strongly anticipates the sober and resilient commitment to hope, in spite of a semblance of the rational absurdity of hope, which runs through much of Beckett's work.

Disinherited absolutists are often compelled by some moment of emotional or intellectual approval through which their ideals become more valid than conventional reality and any *status quo*, to actively attempt to bring their ideal into being: to act specifically on their ideal's *absence* from reality. Rather than despair, the absence of the ideal provokes a resilient open-eyed commitment to its realisation. The Ridiculous Man's change of heart comes about through a conscious personal choice, aware of its remoteness from any external authority or justification - a protest against apparent flaws, made in awareness of the unreality of the ideal it is justified by - in which he, nevertheless, commits to kindling the worldly presence of attitudes and beliefs *he* idealises. This change potentially avoids, or rises above, the disillusioning discovery that what had appeared an absolute moral guide had all along reflected a merely personal, or at least partial, truth. Similarly, the feelings of betrayal and the urge to travesty what suddenly appears a weak and gullible altruism, which reverence for revealed or external ideals typically stores up for the idealist, are nipped in the bud; disappointment is expected, reality's ambivalence is taken in stride.¹⁵

In relation to Dostoevsky's ideological purpose in *The Idiot*, Joseph Frank (in *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*) writes:

... with an integrity that cannot be too highly praised, Dostoevsky fearlessly submits his own most hallowed convictions to the same test that he had used for those of the Nihilists - the test of what they would mean for human life if taken seriously and literally, and lived out to their full extent as guides to conduct.¹⁶

The fearlessness of this submission is not surprising given that the failure of Dostoevsky's beautiful idea is the fulcrum of his rhetorical effect. As Frank suggests, the fate of Myshkin's ethic illustrates the implications of a literal application of his essentially Christian ideal. In Dostoevsky's experimental exposure of a secular vessel

¹⁵ By contrast, "The Sentence", one of Dostoevsky's pieces in *A Writer's Diary* (October 1876, 1.4, 653-56), presents (parodically) the accusatory suicide note of an absolute idealist protesting against a hollow and rapacious materialism. Interlaced in the writer's spiky denunciation of those who consent to go on living in complicity with such a world, there is a cameo of the inhibiting effect of a responsibility to sustain absolute categories of consent and resistance, without the counterbalance of optimism provided by faith. Suicide is the writer's rational solution for fulfilling his idealistic dissatisfaction with the world.

The suicide note strikes an anti-materialistic line, claiming that eating, drinking and sleeping constitute stealing, not only property is theft but all forms of activity undertaken for the good of the individual. The writer is also pinned by Dostoevsky to a particularly silly and plainly obtuse rendition of the reflective individual's longing for blissful ignorance, "Indeed, if I were a flower or a cow I would derive some pleasure" (654).

¹⁶ Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 341.

of Christian patterns of virtue to a secular world, the historical development of Myshkin's ideals and his subjective and emotional approval of their authority are of equal importance to his pseudo-messianic embodying of the "values of Christian love and religious faith", and the "totally irrational and instinctive needs of 'the Russian heart,' ".¹⁷ Beyond Myshkin's interior counsel, the particular meanings he considers himself to be invoking or participating with through his idealised terms are shown to be inherently contestable. For him, as for others, the authority of his ideals is contingent on nebulous conditions intrinsic to but unarticulated in his own involvement with them.

In *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord*, Malcolm Jones suggests that, unlike many of Dostoevsky's characters, Myshkin "does not strive to be original. He is naturally and spontaneously different".¹⁸ Jones is perhaps thinking of Myshkin's epilepsy, and his mystical intuitions, as signs of legitimate otherworldliness, but these are merely one element in the make-up of Myshkin's visionary and didactic compulsions. The aspect that we learn about at the same time that we learn Myshkin is *the* idiot of the title, as well as what this means, is his rehabilitation in a Swiss sanatorium; his sentimental education is implanted as a fund of abstract moral prejudices. While Jones notes quite rightly that it is illuminating to consider Dostoevsky's work as containing attempts to demonstrate the endurance of Christian values in the midst of chaos, his observation, that Dostoevsky "does not impose these values. He submits them to stringent tests which they often seem to fail", suggests an eagerness to perceive an even-handed conducting of polyphonic voices.¹⁹ The failures to which Jones refers are a part of the imposition which he claims they alleviate, they reflect the fate of characters who resist the values Dostoevsky implies offer the only possible order. Jones mistakes the nature of polyphony, or individual relativism, in Dostoevsky's work as a source of unresolvable moral ambiguity (a polyphony which Dostoevsky is supposedly too scrupulous to curtail). It is rather more like a lesson in how to listen to the claims made from within a position of moral relativity, and how to interpret the relationships individuals form with an uncertain moral environment.

Rather than anathematising the human vessels that earnestly approve these secular travesties of transcendent morality, Dostoevsky discredits the tools which, by exploiting their uncertainty and their desire to commit to 'higher' purposes, bewitch them. On behalf of the "little boys and girls" of Russia, vulnerable and credulous in their

¹⁷ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 328.

¹⁸ Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord*, (London: Paul Elek, 1976), 111.

¹⁹ Jones, *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord*, 38.

displacement and confusion, Dostoevsky dissects and stigmatises the provocative lure of secular certainties and the higher purposes they seem to define.

It would seem that Myshkin's role in *The Idiot* ultimately serves Dostoevsky's intention to show that 'original' positions are more likely to be constructed reactions to circumstance than the authoritative inspiration they can seem. 'Authority' can only be placed in God or Christ as representatives of an ideal which, though it might appeal to individuals due to their circumstantial desires and need for consolation, is nevertheless not independently formulated by them as their response to these prompts (the "idea" suggests a symbolic convention, rather, of conceptual solidarity). Dostoevsky binds Myshkin's expansive gestures and his optimistic teachings both to his particular training by a Swiss doctor and humanist, and to the disruption of his personal development by mental illness. Myshkin's "inspiration" is generated by particular circumstances, it is not a revealed or given object of faith, but suggests a benevolent subjective vision reacting against confusion. Nevertheless, the consequences of Myshkin's idealism (his secular religion) are representative of the fate of abstract idealism in an increasingly materialistic and individualistic world. Myshkin offers a portrait of the essential or stripped back origin of any secular idealism and an argument as to why it has to be a disaster, no matter how beautiful its inception and intent, when the shadow of absolutism hangs over its moral accounting for its sacrifices and effects. Myshkin is not simply a victim of the chaos, the element of Dostoevsky's novels around which Jones concentrates his study, he is a symptom of it also. The status of Myshkin's "originality" in the novel, its effects and legitimacy, in relation to both its intended and actual effect, is one of Dostoevsky's gauges of the corruption and the imminent disaster inherent in secular ideals and the moral independence of a profane population from a binding higher idea.

Myshkin's collapse back into idiocy enacts a symbolic condemnation of the secular reality he is exposed to: he is incapable of persevering in a world which is inhospitable to the recognition of any common ideal as the foundation of brotherhood. Myshkin's conviction cannot stand prolonged exposure to the element it aims to reform, he cannot *approve* a compromise (though he has repeatedly done so unwittingly and circumstantially) with the unbeautiful world and his mind shuts down, as if seeking out the asylum and sanctuary of imbecility.

In *Crime and Punishment* Raskolnikov learns to value, in contrast to the isolating obscurity of his solipsistic inspirations, the moral information available through

communication and interaction with others. In *The Idiot*, though, the kind of latent communal values which rise up and triumph over Raskolnikov's attempt to discard them bear the mark of corruption; they exist under suspicion of bad faith. Myshkin's temporary surrender to conventions which he had seemed intrinsically hostile to proceeds through typically evasive and distracted rationalisations of the very habits which, initially he had instinctively opposed as inhibitions to the realisation of his initial idealisation of openness.²⁰

Dostoevsky's fear for the individual isolation and lost intimacy within communities living under the reign of bourgeois eloquence in *The Idiot* is infused into the cultural and social environment which embraces the characters in the novel. The characters oppose the constraints of this embrace through gestures towards transcendent ideals, such as openness and brotherhood, which, by the very standards of absolutism and disinterestedness that they invoke to justify conscientious objection, are rendered futile as tools of interaction with the actual world. The constraints of secular and materialistic social conventions, which ensure that these protests remain incompatible with reality, seem all the more insidious, though, and Dostoevsky's "conclusion" all the more anguished, for the characters' partial awareness of the divisive forces their disunity engenders, and their incapacity to resist or transcend these forces.

The victims in *The Idiot* are victims, like Raskolnikov, of the isolated incoherence of individualist idealism and of the conventions of social conduct equally; neither offers unequivocal solace or a foundation for transcendent moral guides and life-goals. Consequently, individuals are left to float unaffiliated until some semblance of authority offers the confidence and moral support they crave.

Dostoevsky is not so much depicting a process by which human beings learn from their mistakes (and therefore how to avoid them), but a process whereby they learn that mistakes are endemic to human interaction with the world. The positive humanism Frank seems anxious to attribute to Dostoevsky's cautionary tales appears somehow unsuitable to registering the insistent uncertainty and ambivalence that lingers, whether intentionally or unavoidably, around every 'moral' resolution, insight or conviction which his novels often strive to frame. The kind of enlightenment Frank finds in Dostoevsky's paternal didactic stance reflects a kind of desire to find an unequivocally

²⁰ A significant part of Myshkin's unworldly charisma, in *The Idiot*, is reflected in his capacity, initially, to disperse the need for strategic self-representation which Dostoevsky represents as intrinsic to interaction in the refined bourgeois world he enters. Myshkin appears to offer a nebulous but compelling alleviation of the salient (though contestable) standards of proper and desirable behaviour; he is a magnet for private denials of public personae, his presence repeatedly inspires imploring confessions that "this is not what I'm really like".

commendable (by Frank's standards in this instance) agenda at the heart of Dostoevsky's cautionary intention; this relies, though, on a capricious clearing of waters that Dostoevsky himself left muddy.²¹

Myshkin's commitment to his ideal over reality suggests a genuine human fund of disinterested virtue. For Dostoevsky, though, without God to sanction tenable boundaries of moral accountability, forgiveness and permission, this fund, through the emotivist authorities it deifies, will inevitably lead to travesty and discontent (in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan asks, "Is there in all the world a being that could forgive and have the right to forgive?"²²). Without the embrace of spiritual authority, implies Dostoevsky, faith can only be an isolating contingent and problematic response to the need for these kind of boundaries.

Myshkin's commitment to his abstract ideals, an apparent triumph over material self-interest, suggests a desperately enthusiastic gesture to obscure the ultimately contentious integrity of his initial ideal. This, suggests Frank, is "the framework within which the catastrophic destiny awaiting the Prince would be rightly understood."²³ What we see, though, is that these *apparent* negations, the practical contentiousness of Myshkin's idealism in fact galvanise the faith which these negations appear to repudiate. It creates a gap of logic, and demands the a leap of faith which typically binds an idealist even tighter to an ideal which they recognise both as desirable and

²¹ Frank's determination to see in Dostoevsky's reactionary anti-nihilism the even handed concern of a noble about-face underplays the conviction and vigor with which, in spite of his sympathies, Dostoevsky condemns those who repeat the indiscretions of his own radical enthusiasms. I shall argue throughout this thesis that Dostoevsky virulently condemns habits and patterns of radical idealistic intellectualism out of repulsed and embarrassed recognition, rather than with the liberal even-handedness, and Christian mercy which Frank seems eager to impute to him. This woolly habit of inferring motives sympathetic to the particular critic, from what is an abundance of ambiguous conflicting tendencies within the works, is particularly common to Dostoevsky criticism. In relation to authors who deal in the ambiguous relationships which individuals and communities construct between faith, altruism, established order, moral absolutes, concrete necessities, and individual rights and responsibility, this is often the case. Shakespeare's plays, for example, are routinely disputed over by an all but endless array of varying, opposing and mutually exclusive ideological camps, who respectively see in the same work justification for mutually exclusive interpretations and seek to establish their preference as fundamental. For a discussion of a similar tendency towards and reliance on tunnel-vision within Dostoevsky scholarship see S. Zhzhikhashvili's "Notes on Contemporary Dostoevsky Studies" (*Russian Studies in Literature*, 54, 4 (1998), 56-92). Zhzhikhashvili embarks on a rather disgruntled survey which draws particular attention to a propensity of many critics to rely on implicit claims of special insight - something like a mystical kinship with Dostoevsky - into the works. This supposedly special insight is then presumed to justify the offering up of merely asserted, speculative or subjective responses as a source of authoritative insight. Many Russian critics, suggests Zhzhikhashvili, show few signs of having read one another; trusting in the unique insights afforded by their feelings of rapport with their subject, they suppose their own insights to deliver truths to which any reflections on or recognition of studies made by others would simply be superfluous.

²² Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993), 282.

²³ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 328.

unreal. It is this kind of breach which Ivan Karamazov, contemplating a world typified by child abuse, cannot surmount; the ostensible circuit of faith, optimism and implicit approval invites what in Ivan's rational approach amounts to a conscious complicity with an abhorrent and decaying world. Dostoevsky's conviction that the horrors of the world pronounce the need for faith is disrupted for Ivan by a lack of optimism and a dependence on the forms of rational order. For Ivan the horror of the world dispels either the presence or the desirability of divine authority; God is either dead or incompetent. Ivan refuses to consign present sins to retribution in the by and by, "I want retribution, otherwise I shall destroy myself. And retribution not at some place and some time in infinity, but here upon earth, and in such a way that I see it for myself".²⁴ Ivan pronounces, "as long as I am on the earth I shall hasten to make arrangements of my own".²⁵ His conscientious objection protests against the prospective value of any future harmony that would approve with easy conscience its foundation in innocent suffering. While longing for certainty, indeed because of this longing, Ivan rejects the moral framework of divine retribution for its manifest failure to provide a comprehensible presence in human conduct.

Ivan's conscientious objection and the purely human choice it necessitates occupy the void left by the rejected God. In an arresting exposure of an avoided self-image Ivan's Devil taunts him with the disillusioning particularity of his supposedly logical responses to this situation.²⁶ The absence of God leaves the individual unsupervised and a law unto themselves. From moral individualism the next progression is to the principle of separateness (in which the one is equal to all else), and then, Ivan's devil proceeds on his behalf:

The place where I am will at once be the foremost place of all ... "all things are lawful", and *basta!* All that is very charming except that if he intends to play the swindler why does he also, apparently, require the sanction of the truth? But such is our modern Russian manikin, without sanction he will not dare even to play the swindler, to such a degree has he come to love the truth...²⁷

The 'truth' sanctions the actions of its subjects, and the crisis of faith provokes an urgent need of clear conduct and, therefore, an alternative focus of orientation to such

²⁴ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 280.

²⁵ *The Brothers Karamazov*, 281.

²⁶ Ivan's confrontation, essentially with his own past motivations and rationalizations, effects the same disruptive clarity as is experienced by Raskolnikov through the repellant recognition of his affinity to Svidrigailov.

²⁷ *The Brothers Karamazov*, 750.

truths: they become totemic objects serving as vessels for individuals' devotion, rather than valid sources of authoritative external direction.

If vast miseries (such as those which both Dostoevsky and Ivan register so clearly), are to be subsumed into an order or narrative sequence capable, in the by and by, of redeeming the authority that consents in the meantime to arbitrary suffering, then optimism, or faith, are necessities. Such optimism, or faithful commitment, though, is often in conflict with the demands of an immediate reality, it struggles to quiet the conflicting calls for immediate and contingent justice or moral protest, which arise in particular circumstances and in the course of worldly relationships with others.²⁸ Myshkin, for example, seems unable to comprehend the "crime" he comes to commit against Aglaya, but Radomsky demonstrates to him why it might nevertheless be reasonable, given the circumstances, for him to receive and accept blame. Ignorance is no guard against accountability (this is Raskolnikov's lesson also); Myshkin can either admit the finite relationship between his ideal and the prompts of his mute anxieties or he can shut down in the manner of radical idealist retreat. Myshkin's idiocy offers a refuge from the dilemma between idealistic impotence and conscious worldly compromise. It is a similar dilemma which informs Emma Bovary's spiteful suicide, Kirillov's dutifully theorised suicide, Axel's triumphant suicide and Dipsychus' rhetorically rationalised resignation to an existence he despises.²⁹

The tragic discord of inspiration and expression in *The Idiot* is not that of Christ made human; it reflects rather the calibre of a human inspiration to reify the consolations implied in the conditions of Christian brotherhood. Secular inspiration is intrinsically emotive yet avails itself of the qualitative terms formed in the image of divine authority. "Christ's life as a *system* of salvation becomes a generality that can have only partial applicability in the lives of the particular individual's [*sic*] novel as a genre demands".³⁰

²⁸ Though such struggles seem to question the practical possibility of individual fidelity to an abstract idea, a situation where faith is so strong that such struggles could not take place – a truly inhuman relationship with abstract guidelines – holds far more frightening prospects.

²⁹ Kirillov, who appears in Dostoevsky's *Demons*, commits suicide in order to prove his capability as a man-God to arbitrate over his own death. Axel, who is the main character of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *Axel*, is a reclusive aristocratic aesthete. Through a variety of occult manipulations he draws his ideal woman to his castle, and after enjoying the consummation of their ideal love and an imaginatively projected future, he kills his lover and himself in order to preserve his vision's sanctity against the inevitable disappointments of reality. Dipsychus toys with the idea of suicide, his final salute to idealism, "yet I could deem it better too to starve" (2.6.61-62), proposes the glory of refusing to live on in the absence of his ideal. He does not, however, act out this proposition, but, rather, absolves himself of any responsibility to die nobly rather than betray his ideal by rationalising his new alliance to reality as itself an idealistic surrender to the dictates of a higher authority.

³⁰ Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 109. Holquist also suggests that *The Idiot*, "re-enacts the life-death-and-transfiguration of Christ,

But the implications of Myshkin's humanity are not limited to his lack of a divine grace of gesture. Aside from Myshkin's inability to express his inspirations, their "partial applicability" to the lives of other people suggests an inevitable consequence of the solipsistic pedigree of any system or moral worldview issuing from a human brain. Through Myshkin's heritage and his relationship with his intuited Ideals Dostoevsky stylises particular emotive provocations (for instance, abandonment and disorientation) in reaction to which secular idealism is typically constructed.

"But", suggests Frank, "whatever the tragedy that Prince Myshkin and those affected by him may suffer in *this* world, he brings with him the unearthly illumination of a higher one that all respond to; and it is this response to "the light shining in the darkness" that for Dostoevsky provided the only ray of hope for the future".³¹ Frank seems to mistake Dostoevsky's intention in providing Myshkin with a genuine and compelling benevolence. Frank's humanist impulse to accept the hope offered by the beautiful man to a population dominated by selfish materialism defuses Dostoevsky's illustration of the impotence of human beauty or genius - however genuine, compelling, or inspired it might be - to compensate for the loss of external authority. Myshkin's admirable qualities and the impoverished language of the community he enters are rhetorical extremes through which Dostoevsky stresses his point. The human individual cannot construct authoritative consolation without the provision of a stable impersonal frame of reference or language. Beyond his impulse to affirm his inspiration Myshkin is initially devoid of personality, but that impulse alone is self-interested enough to expose the weakness implicit in his desire to be certain. It is the ubiquitous weakness of anxious human beings deprived of faith.

If Myshkin is approached as a Christ figure or even as a holy fool the critique of his ordinary human idealism is disrupted by an emotive oversimplification of a situation which Dostoevsky intends to remain ambiguous. Myshkin's failure to establish order in the image of human idealism is attributable to the absence of divine authority from the novel. The presence of God is inversely manifested in the fate and nature of the various frameworks of individual and communal order which His absence necessitates and facilitates.

In "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" (1877), Dostoevsky depicts the apocalyptic contagiousness of the corruption intrinsic to the contemporary culture of individualism.

as if Christ were not the messiah, but as if he were an individual. What in the Bible is a series of acts interpreted according to their exterior, universal meaning, is rehearsed by Dostoevsky as the actions of particular men, whose meaning is inner, particular" (107).

³¹ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 341.

In his dream, the Ridiculous Man arrives in a perfect world and catastrophically infects it with his explanations of Western civilisation. Rather than provoking an inversion of the Ridiculous Man's catalytic intrusion, Myshkin arrives as the innocent visitor, with inexpressible messages and unrealisable benevolence, and absorbs the problems of the individualist personality to which he had sought to provide an alternative. Myshkin's relationship to the ethic of compassion and openness is somewhat more complex. Myshkin exists within his ethic's semblance of divine sanction as a thoroughly human devotee, he is an unwitting infatuate of his need to believe in the possibility of a general human progression towards the recognition of an authoritative "good". The vagaries of Dostoevsky's methodology in portraying the role of secular idealism, particularly given his implicit condemnation of secular reality, allows Myshkin's role in the novel to readily support overly sympathetic interpretations. Essentially partisan responses such as Frank's appear to be in this instance, obscure Dostoevsky's embracing though latent criticism of the wrong-headed approval of human enlightenment as a sanction of greater authority or knowledge. The embarrassing propensity to act foolishly is not outgrown through suffering, but accepted as a perpetual potential necessitating external checks.

Alongside the transcendent virtue which Myshkin's ethic of selfless compassion aspires to express, Dostoevsky emphasises the undeniably particular aspects of his ostensibly other-worldly enlightenment and the implications of its garbled and compromising reception. In limiting the degree of understanding and intimacy available, the inertia that attends convention's diffusion of challenge, and the isolation of individual inspiration, both point very deliberately to a particular conclusion: the catastrophic absence of God and the consequent loss of a code of truth and morality, commonly accepted as being external to and above human construction.

The fate of Myshkin and the profile of the bourgeois Westernised Russia to which Dostoevsky exposes him are both components of the reactionary realism through which Dostoevsky deliberately targets the atmosphere of abstract discourse in Russia and Europe. With the passion and irascible self-scrutiny of a recovered infatuate Dostoevsky infiltrates the processes of ideological devotion and self-sacrifice to ultimately confront his revolutionaries with the ridiculous contrivances that sustain their image of truth.

Frank writes that in *The Idiot* the "limitation of the narrator, however, is not at all meant to indicate a definitive evaluation of Myshkin by the author (as distinct from the narrator). What Dostoevsky sought to convey was the sense of a character transcending

all the categories of worldly moral-social experience".³² That the narrator's "desertion" of Myshkin is not definitive is true, but rather than ensuring the reader's allegiance or otherwise it seems to demonstrate the gap (of comprehension or sympathy) that exists as a genuine obstacle to Myshkin's communications. He does not transcend the "categories of worldly moral-social experience", their obstruction of his message is Dostoevsky's message. The nebulousness of Myshkin's communication is not the indecipherable other-worldly perfection encountered in "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man". Myshkin is human and his message originates through his human circumstance and personality, but he is unable to relinquish his aspiration to express himself in absolute terms or his desire to believe that such terms exist. His anxious aversion to the explicit possibility of catastrophe, which resides in unadulterated ambiguity, demands an emotive inspiration capable of assuring him that his personal assurances represent Truth. If Myshkin's character transcends anything it is through his refusal to compromise his own commitment to an ideal he cannot clearly express or translate into a feasible ethic. This refusal asserts a desire for certainty and Dostoevsky's conviction that divine faith is the only way in which this desire can safely be requited.

In *The Idiot* and less centrally, perhaps, in Dostoevsky's work as a whole, the reaction of the community to the disruptive roles of individual idealists (typically perceived in "practical" terms as barren, superfluous and awkward) has become allied with bourgeois approval of a hollow moral structure disguised and bolstered by eloquence. In times of readily recognisable, or at least widely approved, abstract authority, Dostoevsky seems to imply, the malcontent or devotee of abstract values could protest against communal malaise in the name of recognised and esteemed virtues which, somehow, have fallen into neglect or been unwittingly overwhelmed by contingent compromises. With the spread of sceptical dissociation from common frames of authority, and with the increasing corruption of abstract idealism by a compulsion to idealise the pursuit (as Dostoevsky notes) of individual happiness and merely material contingencies, though, unimpeachable common terms are no longer available to the prospective malcontent; they cannot even be sure themselves what exactly their ideal is authorised by or directed against.

In the responses of the communities confronted by Raskolnikov, Myshkin and Ippolit, Dostoevsky illustrates the vested interest in the social harmony which is challenged by the individual's quest to approve the validity of their abstract terms of

³² Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 291.

self-orientation. The challenge asserted by radicalism and discontent threatens the inter-relationship of individuals. Porfiry Petrovich's interest in the moral profile of Raskolnikov is more than simply that of a detective and Sonya's response to Raskolnikov's confession voices a more explicit concern on behalf of the communal bonds his crime has affronted. Sonya's faith in the solidity of human community is unequivocal. This faith is less apparent in Dostoevsky's depiction of social interaction in *The Idiot*. The curiosity with which unconventional behaviour is viewed is fraught with the kind of uncertainty that attends the dual observation of natural and conventional hierarchies in Dostoevsky's anatomy of modern social hierarchy (the best people). Myshkin's openness disrupts the observation of social convention but simultaneously seems to galvanise the conviction of the majority that such disruptions merely expose "impossible" impulses. It is the fact that they are indeed impossible within the framework of conventional good manners and *status quo* that Dostoevsky intends to stigmatise.

Milieu

It is evident from the *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863), that Dostoevsky's visit to London provided him with an emblem of the stubborn and devious force of individualism, and a catalogue of symptoms which he began to diagnose in his homeland. In the conditions and behaviour of the vast urban populations of both London and Paris, Dostoevsky's grave suspicions of the secular bourgeois complacency that held the potentially disparate elements of laissez-faire capitalism and individualism in stasis were crystallised in his spontaneous reactions to concrete social patterns. Observing the cultural 'sickness' of the English and French provided Dostoevsky with the conceptual tools to diagnose similar social dilemmas developing in Russia, and nurtured the bias from which he could stigmatise them as intrinsically alien. In the essay "Baal", Dostoevsky observes:

Every abruptness, every contradiction, gets along with its antithesis and stubbornly walks hand in hand with it; they contradict each other yet apparently in no way exclude each other. It seems that they all stubbornly stand up for themselves and live in their own way, yet they apparently do not bother each other. At the same time, there is a stubborn, blind, already inveterate struggle here, a struggle to the death between the general individualistic basis of the West and the necessity of

somehow getting along with each other, of somehow putting together a community and settling into a single anthill ...³³

Dostoevsky finds the English betrayal of the essence of idealism *overtly* dismal for its cynical acceptance of a vacuum of transcendent moral values which French eloquence aims at concealing.³⁴ The communities of London and Paris are linked by “the same desperate struggle to maintain the status quo out of despair, to tear from oneself all desires and hopes, to curse one’s future, and to bow down to Baal”.³⁵ Dostoevsky perceived London as the likely outcome of the blueprints of utopian society, stressing the harmonious balance attainable in individuals’ rational and utilitarian attendance to their self-interests, which radical socialists like Chernyshevsky were preaching at the time.³⁶

It is necessary briefly to contextualise Dostoevsky’s antipathy to Western influences on Russia. One might call his position retrograde, but that would be inappropriate, his nationalism is echoed in one form or another in most countries after the Napoleonic Wars. It is neither elitist nor xenophobic, though in various settings it strikes these poses and more.³⁷ One could almost think of Dostoevsky as welcoming

³³ Dostoevsky, “Baal”, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. David Patterson; 1988 (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 35–42, 36.

³⁴ In this regard, implies Dostoevsky, the difference between the English and French exists merely in the outward trappings of a common ideology of material self-interest: the Parisian pretends to fleece you out of sacred duty while the English would acknowledge the primary motive of individual profit. Each merely resorts to a different justification for pursuing personal satisfaction. See *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 45.

³⁵ Dostoevsky, “Baal”, 36. In comments like this one, Dostoevsky’s extreme concerns for the implications of individualism and materialism in late nineteenth century Europe take on a tone and posture strongly resembling Matthew Arnold’s polemic juxtaposition of right reason and philistinism in *Culture and Anarchy*. In both authors, respective fears that the moral habits of the ignoble populace contain a threat to eclipse more rigorous self-denying codes of ‘spiritual’ idealism generate similar reactionary hostilities to modernity’s disruption of conventional degree.

³⁶ Chernyshevsky’s emblematic utopia, the crystal palace of *What is to be Done?*, would actually end up, implies Dostoevsky, resembling the sullen and suspicious materialistic dystopia he perceived in the slums of London. In *Notes from Underground*, the Underground Man rails against the ‘Crystal Palace’, it is nothing more than a chicken coop, in which the absence of choice or individual desire would reduce individuals to organ stops or cogs in a machine.

³⁷ It is possible to distil from Dostoevsky’s notion of the Western Man the personification of a cultural malaise, rather than a delineation of national or racial characteristics. It is the diagnosis of a problematic relationship between cultured individuals and their idea of community that is the vital impulse, while the nationalist enthusiasms which Dostoevsky’s optimistic prescriptions pin these to reflect the speculative response to a legitimately registered malaise. Dostoevsky, however, chose to see these as inseparable complements (the sickness and the cure) of a global rebirth. It is not necessary to prove he was wrong, it suffices to say that the pertinence of his distinctions related to the intention of his social criticism. The men of Europe are not absolutely destined to be Western men and, as Dostoevsky and many of his peers demonstrate, the educated Russian citizen is no more secure in their Russian-ness than they are immune to the genuine cultural influence and nourishment by the West. The essence of their crisis is a cultural upheaval, and the consequent dilemmas between equally abstracted notions of tradition and civilised progress. The undeniable miscegenation of culture at the educated levels of Russian society and the confusion of origins, heritage and belonging which it engenders, suggests that the idealisation of “the people” was almost a logical necessity in making a clear distinction of a national character possible.

the spectre of westernisation as a revivifying threat allowing him to clarify the manner in which values, travestied or displaced by modern individualistic principles, remain vital and relevant. Nevertheless, at this point it is of more value to examine the symptoms without *applying* Dostoevsky's ideological agenda, but bearing it in mind nonetheless. For through Dostoevsky's depictions of the encroachments of Western culture into Russia, and in the pervasive significance of these depictions in his work, some symptoms of modernisation are helpfully anatomised. Dostoevsky is liberated somewhat by the notion that the human symptoms and idiosyncracies of western modernisation are alien and exorcisable, rather than common human traits flourishing through social and cultural change. In Dostoevsky's epidemiology of social and individual character the foreign bodies which carry such a threat to his ideal are allusively linked to their symptoms. Dostoevsky's fascination with the role of the West in Russia incorporates both admiration and repulsion; he was stimulated by the urgent moral dilemmas – relating to cultural tradition, reform, evolution, revolution, faith, moral community and chaos – which their juxtaposition could bring so strikingly into relief.

While Dostoevsky seeks ostensibly to particularise and distance his observations of the West (they involve 'Parisians' and 'Londoners'), he thinks the cultural depravity he equates with the Western metropolis is contagious and regards it as the ominous adumbration of a Russian future. Appearing immediately after the trip which provided the stimulation for these winter notes, the Underground Man suggests something like a distillation of Dostoevsky's diagnosis of the type of character formed in the artificial retort of Western individualism. In the Underground Man's closing complaints against

Rather than the particulars of the national character, though, it is the actual idealisation, with its capacity to assuage the anxiety for a dwindling national heritage, which generates the enthusiasm for the curative potential of pure Russian-ness.

While complaining, in *A Writer's Diary*, of the new conventional hierarchy of the money bag and the calamity that threatens through the "terrible majority" that acknowledge its status, Dostoevsky reveals the optimistic prospect of a humane and anti-materialist ethic. The Russian people, whom "we" (the educated upper classes), "in our enlightened pride and, at the same time, our naive ignorance, were wont to consider 'incompetent' " (*A Writer's Diary – Volume 1*, 674), had risen up *en masse* and gone to Serbia, to offer their lives "for the sake of some of their brethren" (673). In undertaking this "crusade", suggests Dostoevsky, they have clearly demonstrated their conception of "the best person": "the one who does not give in to material temptation" (674). It remains for the enlightened to synthesise from this demonstration a convention capable of leading Russia and the rest of Europe away from the chaotic rule of the money-bag.

Of course, Dostoevsky was far from alone in his fears for national identity, and similar kinds of optimistic and naïve idealisation of fertile interaction with the Russian peasantry appear also in Tolstoy's work as an antidote to the existential malaise of the gentry. Throughout most of the middle and late decades of the nineteenth century, questions relating to the future of Russian national identity were ubiquitous in intellectual, aesthetic and political debate. This debate was polarised by the Slavophiles, preaching the moral superiority of a simplified return to peasant traditions, and Westernisers who supported an effective surrender of Russian identity in deference to the refinement of the West.

the circumstance that has formed him, though, the outlines and implications of Myshkin's heritage are present also.

It's a burden for us even to be men – men with real, *our own* bodies and blood; we're ashamed of it, we consider it a disgrace, and keep trying to be some unprecedented omni-men. We're stillborn, and have long ceased to be born of living fathers, and we like this more and more. We're acquiring a taste for it. Soon we'll contrive to be born somehow from an idea.³⁸

By transposing the “beautiful idea” of compassionate self-sacrifice, exemplified for Dostoevsky by Christ, into a social atmosphere extrapolated from the sterile separateness and aestheticism of the Underground Man, Dostoevsky travesties his fondest hopes in order to communicate the impossibility of *secular* brotherhood. The repercussions of this impossibility are implicitly manifest in Lizaveta Prokofievna's denunciation, after Myshkin's collapse, of liberalism and abstraction for engendering, in Russia, the hollow and cynical contingency of Western culture. “There's been enough getting carried away with things, it's time to listen to common sense. And all this, and all this abroad, all this Europe of yours, it's all just an illusion, and all of us abroad are nothing but an illusion...”.³⁹ Both the bourgeois eloquence which had resisted Myshkin's ethic of openness and compassion, and the philanthropic enthusiasm that forged his anxieties into a conflicted crusade, exist and arrive in Russia as manifestations of “abroad”. In amplifying the prevalence of Western eloquence and secular individualism in Russia, Dostoevsky projects the prospective condition of a society existing in displacement from its cultural tradition. The community's loss of traditional foundations is manifest in the separation and alienation of its subjects, it is a condition which points to the broader loss of credible frameworks of communal vitality. A loss, that is, which extends beyond nationalistic concerns to feelings of disinheritance from a divine lineage. In *The Idiot*, Keller's enumeration of contemporary parallels to Revelation emphasises the modern political pattern of decisions reached “by

³⁸ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 130. Pevear's and Volokhonsky's translation is the most recent of which I am aware; it differs only slightly throughout from another recent translation by Jane Kentish, *Notes from the Underground and The Gambler*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Pevear's and Volokhonsky's version, however, is more spare and direct; the Underground Man's awkward, insistent and slightly overwrought manner is consequently more apparent in the form as well as substance of his writing, than it is in other translations. Pevear, however, makes a point of translating one of the Underground Man's recurring terms of self-definition, “*zloy*” (which is often translated as “spite” or “spiteful”) as “wicked” which, Pevear suggests, is the more appropriate and accurate term. Defending this decision in the introduction to his translation, Pevear explains that the use of “wicked” reintroduces a spiritual and moral element to the Underground Man's distemper which Dostoevsky meant to be explicit but which the translation “spiteful” obscures by inviting or allowing a merely psychological or behavioural interpretation of his position and its implications.

agreement”, implying a moral frame determined by the strategic compromises of intrinsically separate individuals, rather than observation and application of an unimpeachable body of moral law.

To Dostoevsky’s mind the moral rationalisations allied with and alloyed to materialistic individualism, and exemplified by the idealisations of stasis he associated with the French bourgeoisie, intrinsically excludes *brotherhood* (this is evident in the remainder of “An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois”). In Dostoevsky’s Edenic conception of ‘brotherhood’, brotherhood is not only the end to which utopianism might progress, it is also the only means by which it can be perpetuated. And yet, in the very soil out of which Dostoevsky believed such redemptive brotherhood might erupt and flow out over Europe he observed an increasingly individualistic mind-set taking root. The apparent fervour of Dostoevsky’s conviction that Russia was destined to redeem the spiritually barren state of Western civilisation, owes as much to an awareness of the potent inroads ‘bourgeois’ individualism had made into more advanced Western cultures, as it does to his faith in the fertility of Russian spirituality. The relationship between the reactionary character of Dostoevsky’s ideology and its circumstantial prompts - Russian manifestations of ‘Western’ individualism - offers a doubly revealing relationship. In his hostility to its presence Dostoevsky anatomises a common trend of Western civilisation at that time, the proliferation of the social and cultural symptoms he focuses on is unmistakable throughout the Western world.

Best People

In an 1873 issue of *A Writer’s Diary*, Dostoevsky noted: “Our bankruptcy as ‘fledglings from Peter’s nest’ is now beyond doubt. The Petrine period of Russian History was truly ended by the 19th of February [1861], so that long ago we entered into a period of complete uncertainty”.⁴⁰ In *Crime and Punishment*, Razumikhin particularises some of the consequences of this uncertainty.

It’s what your Moscow lecturer answered when he was asked why he forged lottery tickets: ‘Everybody else is getting rich one way or another, so I wanted to get rich quickly, too.’ I don’t remember his exact words, but the meaning was for nothing, quickly, without effort. We’re used to having everything handed to us, to pulling

³⁹ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Alan Myers (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 652.

⁴⁰ Dostoevsky, “Vlas”, *A Writer’s Diary* – volume 1, 169.

ourselves up by other men's bootstraps, to having our food chewed for us. Well, and when the great hour struck, everyone showed what he was made of[.]⁴¹

Razumikhin refers to the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the great hour when the feudal basis of Russian society was dismantled. From the Moscow lecturer's crime and motive Razumikhin extrapolates a disruption of the basis on which the vitality of moral and ethical distinctions had rested.

In a later issue Dostoevsky discusses the ramifications of this disruption in relation to its effect on the values and individual qualities which formed the backbone of social hierarchy: "[t]he best people ... these are people without whom no society and no nation can live or endure".⁴² They consist of two kinds, "those to whom the people themselves and the nation itself pay their reverence voluntarily, recognising their genuine valor", and "those to whom all or very many of the people or the nation pay reverence through a certain compulsion ... rather as a matter of convention and not completely or genuinely".⁴³ This division of an unconscious recognition and sympathy with particular human qualities as opposed to an observance of conventional forms underlies the social reality Dostoevsky aims to stigmatise in *The Idiot*. On a community steeped in, and potentially sterilised by, the conventions of Western individualism, Dostoevsky unleashes Myshkin as an unworldly embodiment of an ostensible selflessness. Myshkin is capable, therefore, of eliciting the reverence of a "genuine valor"; but it is the nature of this valor to be intertwined with compromising ambiguities which challenge any absolute reverence for its role and worth in the modern realities which Dostoevsky's novels depict.

Examining the significance of the two divisions of this important class Dostoevsky describes the change from the chivalric boyar knights to the Petrine reforms' sorting of the "best people" into the fourteen categories of the civil service. The "great hour" to which Razumikhin refers draws near: "suddenly there occurred one of the most colossal revolutions Russia had ever experienced: serfdom was abolished and everything changed profoundly".⁴⁴ The fourteen classes remained but the "best people" began to falter as the population's views on what was best began to change. That previous notions of the best had become inadequate was undeniable but no alternative had announced itself. "Whom can we now consider our *best* people? Most

⁴¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1993), 151.

⁴² Dostoevsky, "The Best People", *A Writer's Diary – volume 1*, 663-666, 663-4.

⁴³ "The Best People", 664.

⁴⁴ "The Best People", 664.

important, where shall we find them? Who will take the responsibility for proclaiming them the best, and on what basis? Does someone need to take this responsibility? And finally, do we know what this new basis is? Will anyone accept that this is the proper basis on which we must build so much anew?"⁴⁵ Writing in 1876 Dostoevsky could begin to proffer some answers to these questions. Dostoevsky reflects that in the initial dissociation of the agreed criteria of what is "best" in people from traditionally class based distinctions, a rationale for maintaining the status of the actual qualities of previous "conventionally best people" was sorted into the notion of "naturally best people".⁴⁶ In redirecting the esteem of natural virtues to socially approved forms, convention proclaims the authenticity of the spontaneous reverence which determines a community's "natural" hierarchy, while perpetuating traditional prejudices at the level of criteria. In Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* the nihilistic youths, Bazarov and Arkady, pay a visit to Matvey Ilyich, an older relative of Arkady's and a high official. Mindful of the progressive principles of the younger generations Matvey Ilyich recommends the pair pay their respects to the local Governor thus: "I advise you, my dear boy, to go and call on the Governor, ... you understand, I don't advise you because I adhere to old-fashioned ideas of the necessity of paying respect to authorities, but simply because the Governor's a very decent fellow".⁴⁷ In such ways the effective distinctions of respected authorities are transposed into "natural" virtues.

"In the place of the former 'conventional' best people", Dostoevsky suggests,

... there appeared a new *convention* that almost immediately assumed a most terrible significance among us. Oh, of course we had the money bag earlier as well; it always existed in the person of the former merchant-millionaire; but never was it elevated to such a status and given such a significance as in our recent history.⁴⁸

Dostoevsky further distinguishes the former merchant caste and the present merchant caste through their relationship with the upper class. The crowning achievement of the former merchant was to entice a dignitary to their dinners and balls and thereby sanctify their improved though still inferior status. The present merchant class "no longer needs to lure a 'personage' to his house for dinner or give a ball for him; he already has become his kinsman and rubs elbows with him ... he himself is now

⁴⁵ "The Best People", 666.

⁴⁶ Dostoevsky, "On the Same Topic", *A Writer's Diary – Volume 1*, 667-74, 667.

⁴⁷ Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Children*, trans. Constance Garnett, rev. Patrick Waddington (London: J.M. Dent; Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1998), 59.

⁴⁸ Dostoevsky, "On the Same Topic", *A Writer's Diary – Volume 1*, 668.

a somebody, a personage".⁴⁹ The tone recalls Thackeray's *Book of Snobs*, and the content reflects the experience of a similar social realignment.⁵⁰ In both cases social esteem for the status and privileges conventionally associated with nobility are maintained, but the strict hierarchical boundaries (essentially of breeding), and the virtues this hierarchy had purportedly reflected, are compromised by pragmatic materialistic concerns.

The trajectory of the dilemma that ensues from this disruption of traditional social degree is exemplified in the fate of such aspirants to the highest eschelons of public life as Gogol's Poprishchin⁵¹ and Dostoevsky's Golyadkin. A general atmosphere of merely competitive aspiration flourishes in this opened out hierarchy. The sudden semblance of attainability which attaches itself to aspirations and expectations previously unthinkable plays a vital part in the division of self, or mental incoherence, which distinguishes the considerable population of literary doubles emerging in the nineteenth century.

The extension of the Western style of being to the provincial minions allows and entices Dostoevsky to indulge in his most parodic and direct depictions of individualism's destabilisation of conventional social degree.⁵² In *The Village Stepanchikovo* (1859), Vidoplyasov, with his farcical demeanour and the doubly self-indicting rejection of his given name, ends in a mad house. In *The Double* Dostoevsky

⁴⁹ "On the Same Topic", 670.

⁵⁰ In Thackeray's *The Book of Snobs* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1978), the inter-marrying of money and nobility is jeeringly exposed: "Perhaps the best use of that book, the peerage, is to look down the list, and see how many have bought and sold birth – how poor sprigs of nobility somehow sell themselves to rich City Snobs' daughters, and how rich City Snobs' purchase noble ladies – and to admire the double baseness of the bargain" (36).

Any parallel here is most likely due to the similar social transitions which prompt these kinds of inter-class transactions, nevertheless, Dostoevsky was certainly familiar with Thackeray. In the April 1876 Edition of *A Writers Diary* Dostoevsky casts his mind back thirteen years and reflects on an attempt to borrow on of Thackeray's novels from a library. The young librarian dismissively announces, "We don't keep such rubbish" before citing the "rational demand" of social progress which has no use for art (*A Writer's Diary I*, 647-48). Dostoevsky's negative rendition of this experience of ideological censoriousness redresses, perhaps, a similar example, also invoking Thackeray's work, of the utilitarian appraisal of art for its social utility in Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is To Be Done?*. The comparative utilitarian merits of Thackeray's works are delineated in order to offer a sort of litmus test of productive reading: the progressive Rakhmetov responds with pleasure to the social criticisms of *Vanity Fair* but, finding nothing *new* and, therefore, nothing useful, in *Pendennis*, casts it aside after 20 pages (see *What Is To Be Done?*, 283).

⁵¹ Poprishchin translates as "career".

⁵² Turgenev makes use of a similar trope to establish the discordant and somewhat absurd dissemination of urban, cultivated, Westernised fashions, of attitude, clothing, reading *etc.*, to isolated provincial communities. In the opening to *Fathers and Children*, where Arkady's father awaits his son's return from university (and the city), a minor cameo of the clash of modern urban ideas with traditional order is adumbrated in the dismissive presentation of the clownishly *à la mode* servant Piotr. What Turgenev implies, and Dostoevsky tends to do something similar, is that under-educated and ambitious minions like Piotr, or Smerdyakov, merely ape the surface of cultural and intellectual progress and cultivation with no understanding of the deeper currents these surfaces express. Lacking this deeper knowledge these characters tend to end up travestying the values to which their posturings superficially defer.

had already reworked the fate of Gogol's Poprishchin, but in the further revisitation in Vidoplyasov's ambition, the disorientation of the individualist upstart is grafted to the predominantly intact feudal traditions of the rural gentry. In this context the hubris of individualist ambition seems even more absurd, while its social implications have become both more pervasive and disruptive. Vidoplyasov is the protégé of the parasitic petty tyrant and self-appointed *haut-bourgeoisie* Foma Fomich who is also "civilising" the serfs with French lessons.⁵³ In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the sight of Smerdyakov in spectacles, studying French vocables, both confronts and affronts Ivan with a vivid image of a potentially chaotic disruption of the conventional foundations of social degree.⁵⁴ Smerdyakov, like Vidoplyasov, is a provincial underling aspiring to attain the outward trappings of his intuited self-worth and a feeling of more than theoretical equality.

It is worth noting that the relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov – reflecting Dostoevsky's juxtaposition of a well-proportioned, aristocratic lineage of knowledge and ideas with the eager, impressionable, sometimes envious and undifferentiating, adoption by individuals with a less rounded intellectual heritage – is analogous to broader cultural trends and disharmony in Russia's relationship with the intellectual culture of the West. From Peter the Great's Europeanism to the instability of the Tsarist state which Dostoevsky registered with anxious intensity, it is often noted that Russia proceeds through a whirlwind of the historical developments of its Western counterparts: "their history did not seem to parallel that of those privileged states in the West which shared a Roman Catholic Middle Ages or Renaissance Humanism".⁵⁵ Having been grafted without regard for the constitutive circumstantial substructure

⁵³ Foma Fomich, whose vanity and eloquent manipulations of reality announce his Underground affinities, tyrannises the credulous and incredulous characters equally, through his intrusive control and revision of their versions of him. Without this sly tyranny, the other characters might credibly challenge his self-perception. "Do you realize you have debased and dishonoured me by your refusal to refer to me as "Your Excellency", he berates his patron, host, and social superior, "you dishonoured me because in failing to understand my motives, you made me appear a capricious fool who ought to be put away in an asylum" (*The Village of Stepanchikovo*, trans. Ignat Avsey; 1983 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1995), 96). His well bred host is of course sincerely apologetic and placating, to challenge him would be undignified (an ignoble and ill-bred assertion of rank), and Foma knows it. Foma's rule, exerted through manipulative tantrums and accusations, is particularly hard to crush, due to the nurturing indulgence which his outlandish postures call forth from those who patronise him as an overwrought half-man. This novel has also been translated as *A Friend of the Family*.

⁵⁴ For Jones, in *Dostoevsky: The Novel of Discord*, disorder is one of the fundamental influences on and preoccupations of Dostoevsky's work: "above all, Dostoevsky grappled with the great problem which overtook European man in the wake of the French Revolution and the growth of urbanisation: the old certainties, the old unitary views of the world were crumbling" (10). Jones writes also that Dostoevsky understood "that the breakdown of the old religious certainties and ethical values was related to the breakdown of the social order, that individualism, fragmentation, the multiplication of differing ideas and philosophies of life was a phenomenon which made no distinction between social, philosophical, psychological and other factors" (15).

which European culture expressed, the habits of the West penetrated the character of nineteenth century Russia with a similar sort of hierarchical esteem of self-conscious cultivation to that which Dostoevsky reveals as the heart of the modern individual's self-alienating duality.⁵⁶ Mr Golyadkin's loss of self-orientation within the stifling artifice of the unreal city is the burlesque sounding of an alarm which in later works is more cynically portrayed in the paradoxically self-reverential self-stifling of the adolescent careerists (such as Ganya, Arkady Dolgoruky and Raskolnikov). The embittered isolation of Dostoevsky's raw youths is proffered as evidence of the infertile hybridity of a representative generation that has been deprived of the nurture of communal belonging by the pervading individualism and materialism of modernising Russian society: "For the Russians after Peter the clock – or calendar – was always West European, with the consequence that they felt out of phase at any given moment".⁵⁷

In Lizaveta Prokofievna's denunciation of "abroad", which is "all just an illusion", Dostoevsky concludes *The Idiot* on a note of trepidation: with this 'illusion' encroaching, how will the bourgeoisie, and modernising, 'westernising' Russia, avoid the extinction of their Russian characteristics and avoid becoming subordinate to currents they have no organic involvement with.⁵⁸ This is the wider concern in relation to which the particular communal dilemmas take place; Dostoevsky's reactionary nationalism suggests a form of consolation for what he depicts as the infiltration of Western habits into Russian society. Having envisaged Western culture as a disease Dostoevsky can identify social discord as symptomatic rather than endemic, and is consequently liberated to indulge the extremes of his scepticism. In the name of cautionary diagnosis, he is able to register a reality which might otherwise suggest the

⁵⁵ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, 4.

⁵⁶ Sketching the intellectual heritage of nineteenth century Russia, in *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, Michael Holquist invokes the feeling of orphanhood as an analogy for the historical and spiritual condition which many Russian authors directly addressed. Paraphrasing Chaadev, Holquist writes, "it is at just that point when history seems most necessary to the Russians that they discover they do not have one" (14). Where Russia looks for the "understanding of the past, knowledge of the factors which controlled its development through the ages" (14), it finds "nothing durable, nothing permanent; everything flows, everything passes without leaving traces either outside or inside. In our own houses we seem to be guests, in our families we look like strangers..." (14-15). The struggle of individuals against historical and biographical discontinuity is one of the central themes of Holquist's subsequent analysis of Dostoevsky's novels. Holquist's observation that, "in *The Idiot* the generation of the fathers has not passed on to the sons those principles by which the worth of things may be determined" (121-22) expresses in miniature his sense of the importance of the metaphorical condition of orphanhood with which Dostoevsky repeatedly expresses the crisis of modern individualism. Holquist's observation could equally be applied to *Crime and Punishment*, *Demons*, *An Accidental Family* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

⁵⁷ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 4.

⁵⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 652.

extinction of the “natural” potential for selfless devotion or faith, on behalf of which his evocation of despair pleads its case.

“Abroad” in this instance indicates the West, but effectively it signifies the imposition and esteem of cultural artifice which avoids and denies reality rather than being tempered and customised in collaboration with it. It is an artifice which comes to dominate and reflexively challenge what Dostoevsky thinks of as natural human order rather than accepting its answerability to the actual conformation of people and their social world. While the West seems cynically immune to the despair implicit in the synthesised utility which authoritative terms and convictions become, the Russian bourgeoisie, with a kind of national predisposition to the adolescent habit of deification, seems to imbibe the form with a sincere faith in its positivist façade. Myshkin, along with the young atheists whose earnestness he defends, reflects the awkward consequences of sincerely absorbing the alien synthesis of human choices with the residual language of absolute justifications. As long as secular idealism avoids or denies its dependence on emotive usages of ostensibly authoritative language, the individual or relativistic sanctity of each separate “idea” is promoted to the detriment of any grounds for communal discourse; which are reduced to a stagnant conglomerate of fragmented and often incompatible truths. In *Demons*, the various revolutionaries acting with Pyotr Stepanovich have a variety of personally nurtured, ostensibly ideological motivations. The variety alone is suggestive of Dostoevsky’s doubts about the credibility of secular activism. In the light of the atrocities performed out of a desire to test and empower these motivations, Dostoevsky exposes the corrosive desperation that tends both to facilitate this method of dispersing uncertainty and subsequently to compensate for its unexpected inadequacy.

Dostoevsky deliberately disperses and undermines traditionally firm moral and social and spiritual conventions to evoke the metaphysical uncertainties of the sceptical and secular world. In response to the conscientious befuddlement engendered by this world, actions are often performed out of a blind or half-aware need (exacerbated by necessities of practical social interactions) *to provoke* or precipitate definitive feelings and ideas, which might clarify or imply the absolute moral significance of particular types of action. I shall explore this disjunction between conviction and intellectual certainty more thoroughly in relation to *Crime and Punishment*. The desire to provoke the external world into exerting clear boundaries recurs in more banal circumstances throughout Dostoevsky’s work: under the guise of pre-emptive acts of incipient

conviction, all manner of tentative acts of self-experimentation seek out the certainty they claim to reflect.

Often, these tentative acts of inducing certainty are attended by an anxiety for their credibility which, as with Raskolnikov and in the case of Pyotr Stepanovich's nascent dissident cell in *Demons*, actually compels the 'convinced' individuals to act more rashly and with increasing disregard for any ambiguities their convictions deny. Shatov is consumed to vivify Pyotr's insurgent cause and to redress the undermining threat of his increasing estrangement from abstract ideology. The genuinely idealistic proposals implicit in Myshkin's enthusiastic benevolence are similarly neutralised by the sheer necessity of an eloquent *status quo* in granting the population their immediate "right" to pursue their particular happiness.

The Pitfalls of Eloquent Emplotment

"Eloquence", notes Holquist, "is conceived by Dostoevsky not as forceful expression, but as bombast; the characteristic trait of language so used is a disparity between event and expression: eloquence is a term used by him to indicate language's power to deceive; it is form put into the service of *concealing* content".⁵⁹ This "content" is not only concealed from the listener; the act of expression involves a sort of unwitting nullification of undesirable knowledge for the one exerting their eloquence also. Both the actor and the audience have the same stake in eloquence's ability to veil events. Those who keep to themselves (Golyadkin and the Underground Man for instance) are constantly both orator and auditor. The effects of eloquence, though, are not limited by Dostoevsky to the areas in which, in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, he finds them exemplified. Eloquence is not merely the mode through which dreamers, underground cynics, and politicians disguise and diffuse the implications of their evasive truths from themselves and others. The instances Dostoevsky explores are extremes in which the habits and symptoms of eloquence are most apparent. The implication drawn from these instances is of an insidious circumstance, associated with the pervasion of Western ideologies and culture, in which abstract truths have become divorced from a common framework of external authority. The recognisable terms of these undermined truths consequently become a fertile language for rationalising, for all manner of reasons, subjective needs and desires in the ostensibly authoritative language

⁵⁹ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, 46.

of impersonal abstraction. This is not merely due to the availability of these terms, but also reflects the vacuum-like influence of a feeling of having lost an underlying meaning, which demands replenishment.

Holquist suggests that “the underground man is Dostoevsky’s French bourgeois raised to the level of a phenomenological type”.⁶⁰ Or rather, the Underground Man is Dostoevsky’s warning that a disquiet similar to that which breeds the eloquent self-justifications he attributes to the Western bourgeoisie, is spreading as “the anxiety of modern man”.⁶¹ And the discourse of the bourgeois, the eloquence of their “strategies for deceiving”, is becoming the fundamental tool in the anxious individual’s combative rationalisations or denials of discrepancies between real facts and their subjective ideals.

By emplotment (one of Holquist’s terms) I mean to imply a process through which an individual’s self or self-image becomes the focus of a means of understanding experience in the real world as a type of narrative in which the individual is the primary protagonist. It is the key to individualists’ active interpretative experience of reality, and becomes a distorting avidity for lucid tropes of estimable existence.

In “An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois”, Dostoevsky argues that the moral habits of the bourgeoisie are formed by an intention to perceive, in spite of the reality, their state as one in which everything has been “resolved, signed and sealed”; or rather, amongst themselves they have tacitly agreed to affirm this perception.⁶² “If it were not so,” Dostoevsky continues,

then [the bourgeoisie] might think that the ideal had not been attained, that in Paris there is still no perfect earthly paradise, that there might be something more to desire, that therefore the bourgeois himself is not completely satisfied with the order for which he stands and which he forces on everyone, that there are rifts in society which must be mended”.⁶³

Through depictions of similar symptoms of anxious self-delusion throughout his work, Dostoevsky clearly marks many of his Russian characters with what he characterises here as a particularly Western malaise.⁶⁴ In placing static secular impersonations

⁶⁰ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, 48.

⁶¹ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, 48.

⁶² Dostoevsky, “An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois”, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 43-52, 44.

⁶³ “An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois”, 44.

⁶⁴ It is something of this sense of the pathology of the bourgeoisie, individually and as a group, that Dostoevsky was straining to make apparent in *The Double*. Written in 1846, *The Double* indirectly holds Petersburg society accountable for many of the same flaws and patterns of behaviour that are openly criticised in “An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois”; it marks Dostoevsky’s first diagnosis of the Russian strain of spiritual corrosion which individualism (for Dostoevsky an intrinsically European illness) promotes. Dostoevsky was convinced that there was greater significance in *The Double* than had been

(generating the mere semblance of hope) in the place of external ideals, eloquence perpetuates the disruption of idealism from a valid goal, a disruption for which, initially, it had been sought out as a remedy. Dostoevsky implies that the weight of secular individualism's promises to itself imposes a fundamental distortion on the idealist urge, channelling it towards equally stagnant digressions into false certainty and commitment.

Throughout Dostoevsky's work, the strategies characters rely on for telling their truths serve also to evade the undesirable dimensions of ambivalent fact and defuse any psychological aftershocks of this evasion. This is one of the primary tasks of eloquence; but what "necessity" demands it? If eloquence serves the bourgeois, who "smears the little holes in his boots with ink lest, God forbid, anyone notice them!"⁶⁵ in the same way that ink serves his shoes, what are we to understand as the holes which it masks? Holquist suggests that the characteristic trait of eloquence is a disparity (unacknowledged) between event and expression; that is, between facts and individuals' versions of them. This disparity is made-over, eloquently, to support some pre-existing and desired framework of meaning. The fundamental *prompt* of eloquence, therefore, is the disparity rather between event and *expectation*. There is an intrinsic dissatisfaction implicit in the deployment of eloquence, what 'ought to be' (according to a particular worldview) is *not*, but in order to avoid the disruption of admitting this to be the case, what 'ought to be' is made to seem as if it is. Eloquence is developed, it would seem, as the capacity through which the bourgeoisie (in this case) reconcile themselves to the discrepancies between their actual reality and their theoretically justified impression of reality. The alternative to this eloquent reconciliation, acknowledging a flaw or delusion in the expectations to which this impression deems them entitled, would surrender the grounds of their self-esteem.

"Eloquence" indicates a strategic "style of being" which Raskolnikov comes to rely upon similarly in his attempts to evade the reality and consequences of the inadequacy of his own theory. This discrepancy seems inevitable for a class that consider themselves (by necessity, Dostoevsky suggests) the perfect end product of human culture. However, the proliferation of this species of eloquence (alongside the Western principle of the individual) suggests that this kind of discrepancy is dependent

acknowledged, though his conviction wavered in his initial disappointment at the story's poor critical reception. He conceded that his sense of an unfulfilled potential might be due to weaknesses of execution and made attempts throughout his career to revise the work and clarify the implications of Mr Golyadkin's relationship with himself.

⁶⁵ Dostoevsky, "An Essay Concerning the Bourgeois", 44.

rather on the pride associated with individualism, and the response of individualists to the real world's ambivalence to what they consider their entitlements and ambition.

Babble ?

The abstract eloquence of the French bourgeoisie becomes isolated "babble" in the mouths of modern individualists; the Underground Man confesses: "I'm a babbler, a harmless, irksome babbler, as we all are. But what's to be done if the sole and express purpose of every intelligent man is babble - that is, a deliberate pouring from empty into void?".⁶⁶ Turgenev's Hamlet of the Schigorovsky District defines his peers through their chatter, as do Raskolnikov and Razumikhin, and Myshkin's final assertion that no one was saying what they were supposed to points to the confusion of chatter also. Again this suggests a symptom of, or reaction to, the challenge of a moral void or uncertainty.

Eloquent self-justifications of ideas and ideals work at an emotive level, requiring no foundation or validation from a singular or common source of meaning. Fundamental to emotivism, eloquence is the ideal tool for eliciting unimpeachable authority out of an otherwise interminably contestable ontological scene. Ambiguities, with their capacity to demand qualification from any secular truth, are strategically discredited or denied to facilitate the kind of certainty that had seemed logically unattainable in the absence of a common external authority

Like Myshkin's symbolic encoding of his mute anxieties into the symbols, memories and beliefs which serve as the touchstones of his faith, emotivist moral forms reflect associations that appear to justify moral positions but actually assert them. They are consequently proposed as ordered principles rather than the reactionary manifestation that they are.

⁶⁶ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 18. In *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, Dostoevsky represents the eloquence of the French parliament as the emblematic dialect of bourgeois bad faith. In *The Idiot*, Keller's delight in the manner in which members of the English Parliament "address each other" suggests the desired effect of this etiquette, "I mean all these nice expressions, all this Parliamentarism of a free people - that's what's attractive to folks like me!" (). The formal indirectness of " 'the noble viscount sitting opposite', 'the noble count who shares my opinion', 'my noble opponent who has astonished Europe with his proposal' " (392), suggests a charade and at the same time a potential conduit of abstracted discussion of principles. Even though Keller's pleasure implies an ironic disbelief in the sentiment beneath these expressions, their superficial forms are no less enchanting.

Discussing the ramifications of the loss of a commonly approved framework of virtue, in *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that when “[m]oral judgements lose any clear status and the sentences which express them in a parallel way lose any undebatable meaning” these “sentences become available as forms of expression for an emotivist self which, lacking the guidance of the context in which they were originally at home, has lost its linguistic as well as its practical way in the world”.⁶⁷

When such moral judgments are received as individual expressions, their circumstantial particularities become revealing dimensions of the overall character of such judgments’ fuller “meaning”. Moral positions imply a historical, sociological and psychological narrative rather than providing the individual with a means of orientation to an external moral frame.

In *The Idiot*, the appearance of the delegation supporting Burdovsky in his claim against Myshkin is pre-empted by the eager curiosity of the gathering, predominantly gentry and adult, “to have a look at these young people”, who, Lebedev informs them, have “gone further than the nihilists”.⁶⁸ Lebedev adds:

Nihilists are sometimes well informed sorts of people, even scholarly, but these have gone beyond that because, first and foremost, they’re men of action, ma’am. ... They don’t express themselves through newspaper articles, they act directly, ma’am; its not a question of the pointlessness of Pushkin or anything like that, or the need to break Russia up into fragments; no, ma’am, nowadays it’s regarded as an absolute right that if anybody wants something badly, all barriers should be disregarded...⁶⁹

With public acts of justification and rationalisation deemed obsolete, stubborn, self-sufficient silence descends as the prevailing ideological atmosphere of a field of moral agreement. Unalterable personal convictions are expressed in postures which betray a valuable and jealously guarded certainty. But aside from the proposed freedom of such an ethic there is an equal motivation to avoid the inhibiting ambiguity of actual rationalisation and abstract explanation. The inarticulateness of the “young people” represents a denunciation of eloquence but also reflects their continuing dependence on feelings of absolute authorisation (they cannot be sure of agreement, so they rise above it in a posture of certainty). Only eloquence (reviled as the chicanery of the bourgeois *status quo*) can furnish expression of abstractions with absolute certainty. Expression,

⁶⁷ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 60.

⁶⁸ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 270.

⁶⁹ *The Idiot*, 270.

therefore, offers nothing but stultifying ambiguity; it is redundant to the categories of justification offered by rational individualism in the place of moral absolutes.

In depicting the desolate end-point of a paradise contaminated by worldliness in “The Dream of a Ridiculous Man”, Dostoevsky recycles his apocalyptic vision of the conditions experienced by the inhabitants of London (in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*). He renames London “Baal”: in Baal everyone is drunk, “not with cheer but dismally” and “in rather a strange way, silently”.⁷⁰ The desperation and “suspicious silence” he encounters in the slums of London become symptoms which, for him, characterised the populations of wilfully separate individuals formed under the flawed idealism of bourgeois “western” individualism.

On returning from paradise, the Ridiculous Man reflects, “While understanding the words, I could never comprehend their full meaning”.⁷¹ Similarly the ridiculous man has to convey his approval for the paradise in the sun with gestures. A fragmented communication seems possible, explanation of concrete facts and relationships, but regarding the beliefs and ideals, abstract assurances and the social blueprint of the paradise there is an unbridgeable gap of incomprehension.

In “Bobok”, the convention of eternal reward for spiritual virtue is starkly contrasted with the overheard “reality” of the afterlife: an eternity of mundane chatter and intractably worldly trivialities. This travesty provocatively implies a fundamental limit to the capacity of humanity (particularly cultivated, western humanity), when addressing morality, spirituality, or any other abstract “virtue”, to transcend their merely worldly interests and existence. It insinuates the mere contingency and hollowness of any intellectually formulated promises of anything “better” to come.

As MacIntyre suggests in *After Virtue*, due to the persistence of incompatible modes of moral discourse, the emotivist, novelistic, or simply ontologically disparate scene is typically experienced as a state of deprivation. For similar reasons, individuals seeking stable order and personal certainty tend to experience an ambivalent and uncertain reality as a scene of implicit and unavoidable insult. The origin of this supposed insult, and the reason for its prolonged reverberations, is the individual’s self-conception, which, having become a focus for feelings of self-esteem and moral authority, they aspire to justify as an objective reality, empirically manifest in their emotions, thoughts

⁷⁰ Dostoevsky, “Baal”, *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, 38.

⁷¹ Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary* – volume II, 955.

and actions. Determined by pride, will, or vanity, the health of such self-conceptions is consequently reliant on fragile subjectivism alloyed with a feeling of being outnumbered but not outdone by ambivalent fact.

As long as potential disruptions can be diffused, the disparity between experience and a cherished ideal can be discounted; but ambivalent reality always contains an immanent threat. In Dostoevsky's work both the threat and the reality of being insulted are primary stimuli to eloquence, rhetorical deflections of potentially degrading interruptions are fundamental to sustaining the credibility of the cherished self-image. Eloquence at once provides a means of retaliation and compensation for the sense of humiliation and diminishment the insulted individual experiences. The individualist experiences the scale of this in accord with the authority invested in their individual self. Without any overriding moral criteria or etiquette to defer to, the individualist that suffers the "telling" insult is threatened at the root of their self-orientation.⁷²

In "The Meek Girl", the first insult received by the pawnbroker – his exclusion by his military peers after his failure in a point of honour – is absorbed into the narrator's monologue as the notion of his own martyred innocence and the wickedness of the world. The reproach he experiences when he discovers that the meek girl sings in his absence, however, disrupts the foundations of his implied authority. The girl's singing is not intended as an insult, but it shocks the Pawnbroker and confronts him with his culpable neglect of the girl's independent existence. The meek girl's autonomy has been stifled and then eclipsed by the pawnbroker's self-solacing assumption of her independently sympathetic understanding of his fate.

⁷² Dostoevsky's gestures towards the higher development of personality, in which an individual surrenders his or her interests in deference to the interests of others, typically include the character's failure or refusal to respond to or register insults or impositions in the self-solacing manner of convention and of his or her peers. The anomaly of such a breach of the easy conventions of supporting public dignity and pride is reflected in the concerns of such character's "allies", who suffer on behalf of their friend's insulted honour. In *The Idiot*, for instance, the Yepanchins (Myshkin's allies) are incensed by Myshkin's refusal to denounce, rather than merely refute, the Burdovsky group's attack on his character. The antithesis to the kind of self-abnegation Myshkin's forgiveness gestures towards is the irascible egocentric paranoia of the Underground Man. The observation Dostoevsky made in his notebook, "Contemporary man. He avenges all the injuries which no one did him, nor thinks of doing him" (*The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks 1860-81, volume III*, 133), to which I have referred once already, seems particularly pertinent to this distinction. The attribution of insults and their effect on individuals' pride and sense of individual dignity serve as significant measures or standards, in Dostoevsky's exploration and depiction of individualism and its potential ramifications.

Kolya's father in *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Makar Dolgoruky in *An Accidental Family* (respectively a downtrodden pragmatist and a cuckolded mystic), offer two allusive depictions of the deportment of, and the misunderstandings invited by, characters who are affiliated with codes of conduct which deflect worldly challenges to the dignity of the individual self in deference to a selfless concern for values on which this dignity might impinge. In addition to the indignities and limitations imposed by his social inferiority, Kolya's father suffers under his son's disappointment in his apparent incapacity to assert his right to decent treatment and respect. This too, he accepts, though in extreme anguish, as a burden he cannot do otherwise than bear for the sake of his family.

The Underground Man notes how he:

. . . owing to my boundless vanity, and hence also my exactingness towards myself, very often looked upon myself with furious dissatisfaction, reaching the point of loathing, and therefore mentally attributed my view to everyone else.⁷³

It is to break a similar circuit that the pawnbroker needs the meek girl: his attempts to cultivate in her his own understanding of his predicament, and to then impute this understanding as her own, allows him to feel that his cherished self-image has been approved unbidden in recognition of its inherent justness. He is able therein to dispute the legitimacy of the insults he feels from a world which, in its misunderstandings of his circumstance, challenges his entitlement to his self-esteem. Both the Underground Man and the pawnbroker prey upon vulnerable others to counterbalance the fluctuating credibility of their idealised self-images. In maintaining these self-images, they provide themselves with a shelter against the compromises into which they are naturally drawn by a world of ambivalence and uncertainty. Their exploitation of others, then, seems justified to them as a means of compensating themselves for their existence in a world which, in its lack of any absolute structure or code of conduct capable of providing them with the kind of support and guidance necessary to maintain their subservience to ideals, seems morally reprehensible.

While the sickness and incoherence of the Underground Man's perpetually re-plotted life seems particular, the intensity of Dostoevsky's depiction of this affliction is grounded in a sense of the virulence inherent in the very banality of its origins.⁷⁴ The pathology of the Underground Man's bookishness and imitation, though his case is extreme, is typical: similar symptoms in other characters suggest a similar relationship with the world. Basic elements of the Underground Man's conflicted self-centred objectivity are common: radical doubt as an expression of radical individualism, for instance, along with the tendency of this scepticism to induce a cult of selfishness,

⁷³ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 43.

⁷⁴ The Underground Man gives some examples of the "quite ready-made" forms of reality which he has "stolen from poets and novelists" (*Notes from Underground*, 58):

For example, I triumph over everyone; everyone, of course, is lying in the dust and is forced to voluntarily acknowledge all my perfections, and I forgive them all. I fall in love, being a famous poet and court chamberlain; I receive countless millions and donate them immediately to mankind, and then and there confess before all the world my disgraces, which, of course, are not mere disgraces, but contain an exceeding amount of "the beautiful and lofty," of something manfredian. Everyone weeps and kisses me (what blockheads

wherein “I am unique” or *Je suis autre*, implies that ‘I’ need not concede to any external order, but will defiantly adhere to my own. The sphere in which such notions of originality and uniqueness typically exist, though, is highly standardised and conventional: “everytime I came to work I made a painful effort to carry myself as independently as possible, so as not to be suspected of meanness”.⁷⁵ The Underground Man discovers, however, that the techniques of self-generation which are necessary to satisfy his desire to *appear* independent ultimately drain his “unique” character of any *meaningful* significance in isolation from the external conventions he flaunts. The Underground Man is as susceptible to the notion of his independence as he imagines his audience to be; the superficial significance that his behaviour imparts reinforces his dependence on it. After all, these strategies are developed to provide the *impression* of an external significance capable of disguising from oneself the absence of commonly accepted absolutes. Though such strategies are essentially barren, they are useful nevertheless; they placate the inhibitive fragile and spiteful self-dependence of his sceptical individualism.

The Underground Man’s predicament, within his own self-imposed system of fictive significance, demonstrates the infertility of a mind which, through an idealisation of the role of absolute truth leading to an unhappy marriage of expectation and sceptical perspicacity, has become dependent on “eloquent” fabrications of certainty from the multifaceted substance of a genuine confusion. The Underground Man resentfully depends on seeming truths in which he merely pretends to believe (and is cheapened in his own eyes by this pretence).

Holquist suggests that for the Underground Man “the *idea* of order itself” has collapsed.⁷⁶ Consequently, Holquist continues, he “must make up plots for himself to figure in, because none of the available systems used by others to structure their lives are for the underground man acceptable”.⁷⁷

Why, though, is this the only ordering technique available? Why “must” the Underground Man, as Holquist writes, “make up plots”? Holquist’s emphasis on the Underground Man’s *compulsion* towards emplotment is well-founded, but there is an important determinant a further step back: that is, the prior construction of a framework in which literary models determine what the Underground Man considers an estimable and desirable existence. This framework in turn determines both his sense of reality’s

they’d be otherwise), and I go barefoot and hungry to preach new ideas and crush the retrograde under Austerlitz. (*Notes from Underground*, 58).

⁷⁵ Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 43.

⁷⁶ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 56.

inadequacy, and the form his imaginary gratifications take. And again, a further step backwards in causality directs us to a mindset that requires external authority to dictate meaning and impose a higher purpose on existence. Self-employment need not be literary (religious faith, for example, offers a kind of archetypal employment), but will typically have a narrative element facilitating the creative interpretation of events and experiences as causally related factors of a just whole. The nature of these narrative frameworks, with emphasis on causal relations between events and ethical consequences, resembles the kind of interdependency of action and outcome endorsed by the gospel tradition, and fundamental to the purposive element of Christian virtue.

No matter how discontinuous or fragmented a book, text, work, or expression is, as an exertion or compulsion it remains a demonstration of a desire to communicate.⁷⁸ Communication involves a gesture of faith, however despairing at times, in the possibility of establishing sympathy and understanding for subjective interior moral frameworks and justifications; the possibility, that is of orienting subjective truths to a wider frame without their subjective and partial authority being provoked into, or adopting by necessity, postures of forced certainty; it invites the consummating input of another's reaction and interpretation.

* * * * *

The outward demeanour of dreamers reflects the necessary betrayals and evasions, both of the real and the ideal, to which they are constantly driven. The narrator of "White Nights" describes this demeanour as:

... the look of an unfortunate kitten perfidiously captured by some children and then crushed, terrified and generally maltreated by them to the point of utter confusion, which then finally creeps away from them and hides under a chair in the dark, where for a whole hour it must bristle up, spit out its frustration and wash its insulted face with both paws, and for a long time thereafter looks with hostility upon life and nature.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 58.

⁷⁸ Individuals who struggle with an incapacity to align the moments in their life into sequence are nevertheless reacting, in this struggle or uneasiness, in terms of a shared whole. This is perhaps obvious and does not offer any alleviation or comfortable sense of cohesion; what it does point out, though, is the distempering involvement of a dissatisfied consciousness underlying what are felt to be discontinuous moments.

⁷⁹ Dostoevsky, "White Nights", *Uncle's Dream and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1989), 71-121, 85-86.

For absolute idealists, the experience of ambivalent reality has a similar effect; the obliviousness of reality to their respective ideals gives rise to feelings of persecution and deprivation. The disillusioned idealist is often a spiteful creature, feeling cheated and cheapened by their faith in the possibility of attaining the ideological fulfilment to which they feel somehow entitled. In *The Idiot*, Ippolit's feelings of disinherited isolation, anguish and futility fuel his conscientious protest against what he considers the essentially unjust patterns of actual existence. His "Necessary Explanation" constitutes a catalogue of intolerable but ubiquitous suffering and dissatisfaction; these concrete failings compel his conscientious objection to a world that is essentially recalcitrant to conceptions of higher justice. Ippolit's curiously chimeric complaint is typical of the reactionary disillusionment invited by naïve presumptions that the natural world obeys and can be understood through a principle conducive to human understanding and notions of order (or chaos); but it also exemplifies the human engagement with confusion in which moral conventions and agreements have their inception. It is one of the characteristically self-defeating habits of this kind of protest against uncertainty that, in protecting the ideals it engenders and the protests they motivate from the mortification and disruption latent in the perspectives and "truths" observed by others, these characters isolate their moral activity from the possibility of interaction with others. Their necessarily self-reliant reverence for abstract ideals remains stagnant and sterile, with the burden of its apparent futility exacerbating the sense of disinheritance from a dignifying common tradition.

In "White Nights", the narrator insistently emphasises the addictive nature of imaginary self-indulgence: it constitutes a "subtle, voluptuous poison".⁸⁰ The alienation from ordinary reality which such addictions breed reinforces these individuals' belief in the legitimacy of their dissatisfaction with reality, further perpetuating their dissociation from it.⁸¹ The emphasis placed on *independent* desire in the first part of the

⁸⁰ "White Nights", 89.

⁸¹ Similarly, Emma Bovary's impatience with ordinary reality and her propensity to lay the blame for her dissatisfaction at its feet, is a side effect of her dependence on the measure of reality which she takes from romance novels. There is something gentler about Don Quixote's no less insistent refusal of the sanctity of ordinary reality. Though they are essentially the same, the kind of hollow bourgeois background from which bovaryism emerges, and its typically selfish preoccupation, lends the addiction to the seductive self-esteem promised or supported by a false reality a more uncomely vein of spiritually impoverished compulsion. Nevertheless, the same uncomely patterns *can* be seen behind Don Quixote's chivalry: "Seeing that he was in fact unable to stir, it occurred to him to resort to his usual remedy, which was to think of some passage in his books" (*Don Quixote*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1950), 52). Raskolnikov consults his "authority" - the idea of Napoleonic power and impunity - in a similar fashion; he has also been becalmed in uncertain and ambiguous reality and requires an overt directive to spur him to committed activity.

Underground Man's notes (one of the esteemed abstract principles which mould his self-image) is ironically juxtaposed, in the final scenes with Liza, with the actualities of his hollow freedom and barren individuality. The Underground Man's need to maintain the self-esteem he experiences in following the bookish templates he has invested with absolute value and virtue, drives him repeatedly to perform actions which, though he approves their general aptness, he finds problematic and unsettling as means of treating an actual person.

The Underground Man's dependence on bookish conventions to superimpose meaning and purposefulness on his otherwise tenuous involvement in the circumstantial events of his life produces a self-perpetuating pattern of hollowness and mediated existence. Of course, the interweaving of literary nuances, explanations and significances can offer a harmless means of therapy and comfort (books play a similar role to this in *Poor Folk*). However, the Underground Man does not absorb but is absorbed by his bookish fantasies, he is not nourished but consumed.

But how much love, Lord, how much love I used to experience in those dreams of mine, in those "escapes into everything beautiful and sublime": though it was a fantastical love, though it was never in reality applied to anything human, there was so much of it, this love, that afterwards, in reality, I never even felt any need to apply it; that would have been an unnecessary luxury.⁸²

Rather than framing responses to the "suggestions" of reality the Underground Man's plots exert strict and compromised acts of censorship. The Underground Man's method of emplotment strives to make what happens in reality conform to pre-existing (and borrowed) models, the meaning of which has already been settled in his own understanding. He tries to order the world through received fictional templates, refusing to acknowledge the contentious presence of that which lies outside a process which has become crucial to his sense of existence.

Everything, however, would always end most happily with a lazy and rapturous transition to art - that is, to beautiful forms of being, quite ready-made, highly stolen from poets and novelists, and adapted to every possible service or demand.⁸³

The Underground Man's reliance on this recourse to bookishly idealised tropes of behaviour is evident throughout the second part of his notes.

⁸² Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 57.

. . . I'll say, 'Look, monster, look at my sunken cheeks and my rags! I lost everything - career, happiness, art, science, *a beloved woman* - and all because of you. Here are the pistols. I've come to discharge my pistol, and... and I forgive you.' Here I'll fire into the air, and - no more will be heard of me..."

I even began to weep, though I knew perfectly well at the same moment that all this came from Silvio and from Lermontov's *Masquerade*. And suddenly I felt terribly ashamed, so ashamed that I stopped the horse, got out of the sledge, and stood in the snow in the middle of the street. The jack watched me with amazement and sighed.⁸⁴

This passage establishes a concrete association of momentum, literal and narrative, with feelings of meaning or purpose. The Underground Man's shame for the plagiarisms on which he absurdly props up his self-esteem literally stops him in his tracks, but his awareness of the absurdity is ultimately permissive, he goes on regardless, resigned to the ridiculous subterfuge of his motives. In *The Double*, Golyadkin expedites his pettiness, disproportionate pride, envy and mean ambition (none of which he can admit to), by disclaiming his personal agency; in the Underground Man's absurd mental pantomimes an estimable self-perception is maintained by projecting dignified rationales onto his actual motives. The Underground Man's affinity with this manner of super-imposed significance appears to be determined by a shameful addiction to his inflated self-opinion and the spiteful denial of the purely eloquent means through which this phantom is sustained. When his suspicions of this inadequacy come to the fore, however, sequence is suddenly arrested and the Underground Man finds himself exposed to a very daunting uncertainty. The merest hint of this uncertainty - "What was to be done? To go there was impossible - the result would be a nonsense; to leave things as they were was also impossible, because the result would then be..."⁸⁵ - exposes the necessity of a kind of rigorous grappling with groundlessness, which the Underground Man avoids in favour of sheltering from uncertainty in borrowed narrative sequences. The stasis weighs so heavily on the Underground Man due to his poverty of internal resources, values or directives; the possibility of gradually discovering internal appetites and traits is dismissed by the burden of an appetite for assurance which the semblances of external truths leached from literary templates had previously satiated

To recall at this point the Underground Man's claim, reacting against the edicts of utopian socialism, that man needs only *independent* desire, is not necessarily to refute it or to accuse him of hypocrisy. Independent desire, he alleges, is of the highest value,

⁸³ *Notes from Underground*, 57-58.

⁸⁴ *Notes from Underground*, 84-85.

⁸⁵ *Notes from Underground*, 85.

“whatever this independence may cost”.⁸⁶ This “cost”, however, is the formlessness of having no authority above or external to himself. It is a cost which the Underground Man intellectually approves but from which he instinctively flees into the diverting sequences of emplotment. The sequence above is emblematic: recoiling instantly from a disrupting scrutiny of his motives the Underground Man returns to the comforting momentum of the sledge as it carries him forwards in the narrative pattern he has invoked to make sense (*desirable* sense) of his situation.

The stalling of the Underground Man’s bookishly plotted impetus briefly disperses the assurances around which he has developed his personality. He finds himself reliant on an appropriated jumble of impulses and ideas for which suddenly he can recognise no grounds of discrimination and organisation. Falling back on an expostulated incantation of conviction, a ritual fittingly farcical and melodramatic, the Underground Man recommits himself to a narrative momentum: “Lord! How can I leave it?! After such offenses!”.⁸⁷ The dubious reality both of the insult and his reactions is trumped (but not *resolved*) by the necessity of maintaining the momentum provided by a ready-made plot.

The price the Underground Man pays for his selective rearrangements of reality becomes clear in his interaction with Liza, the prostitute he has embroiled in a personal drama of philanthropic compassion. After a disastrous sequence of reality’s disruption of his ready-made expectations, the Underground Man seeks to re-establish a feeling of prescience and control by maliciously insulting Liza. She evades his gesture with her own, scorning his charity. “I could have expected her to do that” he suggests with self-mockery, before admitting: “No. I was so great an egoist, I had in fact so little respect for people, that I could scarcely imagine she, too, would do that”.⁸⁸ The Underground Man knows he is callous and destructive, but this is what he feels justifiably reduced to in order to sustain himself in the void of values produced by his thoroughgoing sceptical individualism.

Liza, an external uncontrollable reality, presents a dangerous threat to the credibility of the Underground Man’s narrative organisation of his life: “I was so used to thinking and imagining everything from books, and to picturing everything in the world to myself as I had devised it beforehand in my dreams, that at first I didn’t even

⁸⁶ *Notes from Underground*, 26.

⁸⁷ *Notes from Underground*, 85.

⁸⁸ *Notes from Underground*, 127.

understand this strange circumstance".⁸⁹ Plot-ing quickly takes over, though, it consumes unexpected and uncomfortable realities; even when these are not consciously evaded the Underground Man's turn of mind leaps to dilute any threat to the coherent tone of his existence.

When Liza arrives in his apartment, having responded to his insistence that she start a new life and to his offers of kindness, they have sex (this is not stated, but is implicitly plain). Afterwards, he makes it clear that she is no longer wanted, and as she is leaving he pushes a five-rouble note into her hand. The Underground Man instinctively travesties the possibility of radical personal reform (she has intervened in her fate) which Liza's optimistic and supplicatory arrival in his home has confronted him with: he compulsively and knowingly humiliates her, reinstating her previous unhappy state as a sexual commodity. Aside from the personal demands it imposes on him, Liza's appearance brings with it an implicit but potent challenge by affirming the possibility of radical activity.⁹⁰

Such game playing - covertly or indirectly imposing particular contexts onto random events so that they yield implications desirable to himself - provides the Underground Man with ostensibly objective validations of his self-esteem, thereby protecting the only impulse which imposes imperatives on his otherwise meaningless existence. Consequently, he is unable to support a moral character, and must merely embellish reality with the particular meanings necessary to support the image or impression he has approved as representing worthy or moral behaviour.

Supporting this image, though, thwarts the possibility that his self-conception (which, to him, *feels* valid as long as this esteem seems, again to him, ostensibly reasonable) might grow or change through any recognition of its merely solipsistic foundations. In such instances, within these bookish games, a concealing and evasive motive is to the fore; these are strategic manoeuvres: the play of imagination struggles to subdue the credibility of reality's disruptive intrusions into its fancied forms.

⁸⁹ *Notes from Underground*, 123.

⁹⁰ It is important to the Underground Man's continued feelings of justified stasis that the prospect of change or self-improvement be deflated. This overwhelming tendency towards conceptual stasis seems to make a lie of the Underground Man's proclamation that he would let his tongue be cut out, if "it could be so arranged that I myself never felt like sticking it out again" ; if, that is, "an edifice, at which it is possible not to put out one's tongue" were to materialise (*Notes from Underground*, 36). It is always worth remembering, though, the credulity towards his own self-knowledge which seems necessary to the Underground Man's "healthy" relationship with his ready-made postures and motivations (he is particularly indulgent of, and willing to believe in, his own intuitions and ideas about himself). That the Underground Man can stick his tongue out at Liza's reform, for instance, is due more to his well-drilled rhetorical defences than to any intrinsic flaw or insincerity in Liza's approach.

Subsequent to his sham-philanthropic rant at Liza in the brothel, and prior to Liza's appearance in his home, the Underground Man suffers a few days of anxiety before calming down enough to consign the possibility of Liza acting on his advice to a suitable fantasised literary scenario. The "sweet dreams" which Liza's absence facilitates centre on the sensitivity with which he would have treated her devotion to him as her benefactor and saviour. The Underground Man then lets his "tongue run away" with him, "in some such European, George-Sandian, ineffably noble refinement ..."; after which he sanctifies the imaginary romance with a couplet of poetry, before recoiling, suddenly "sticking my tongue out at myself".⁹¹ He is frustrated and repulsed by the mediocre petering out of the storyline once the trope gives way to his own imagination, he can control reality with his narrative tools but he cannot change or add to it. The pleasure which the Underground Man experiences through borrowed story lines is in counterpoint to the impotence of his own imagination, but it is tainted also by his frustration at the dependence this necessitates. In his recourse to "completely ready" forms he catches a glimpse of his dependence on a mediocrity which the stylised melodramatic profundity of the models he is drawn to shows him desperately trying to evade. His incantations of the sublime, lofty and original style of being are by this point only the dregs of a floundering idealism, and the only satisfaction it affords him is the mockery he directs at his persisting dependence on such forms.

But try getting blindly carried away by your feelings, without reasoning, without a primary cause, driving consciousness away at least for a time; start hating, or fall in love, only so as not to sit with folded arms. The day after tomorrow, at the very latest, you'll begin to despise yourself for having knowingly hoodwinked yourself. The result: a soap bubble, and inertia.⁹²

The Underground man does not shy away from the deep incompatibility between the literary tropes he esteems so highly and the facts of his deportment in real life. The very couplet that had inspired his fantasised romance with Liza is reiterated with perverse pride as a banner embracing the humiliations that result from the arrival of Liza, in the flesh, in his home.

The bitter nature of the Underground Man's insistence that there are no feelings, beliefs or rules which are capable of offering him (or anyone) stable and certain foundations, reflects a distempered truth, a despised clear vision which is then blurred in the backlash

⁹¹ *Notes from Underground*, 111.

of disappointed expectations. This distemper typifies the consequences of approaching the moral confusion of secularism with an initial commitment to form such foundations only on absolute truth (the kind of despised perspicacity which dogs the Underground Man is shared by Dostoevsky, one feels, necessitating the overly stylised or symbolic moral conclusions which, while conforming to the moral templates he *wants* to approve as feasible realities (for his own benefit as well as his readers'), seem suddenly abrupt circumscriptions of his creative explorations into sprawling moral ambiguities). The Underground Man's experience of ambivalence does not appear to confirm a disinterested prediction or intuition of chaos, it merely thwarts his desire for order. Ambivalent fact, "living life",⁹³ dissipates the solipsistic credibility of his ideal self-image and he construes it, therefore, as the nemesis of his idealism when it is nothing of the sort. Due to the chaos which his sceptical individualism and his thwarted idealism seem in conjunction to confirm, the Underground Man is driven to structure his reality by recourse to ready-made models which convey, through merely aesthetic effect, ostensibly worthy and stable moral and behavioural codes. He exults in fancies of George-Sandian philanthropy; imputes to himself the brooding pride of Byron's Manfred; shapes his intentions to mirror a romanticised chivalry he takes from Pushkin and Lermontov.⁹⁴ The ready-made models he esteems - literary rarefactions of actual life - are stylisations, though, which are inconsistent with the full testimony of multifaceted reality. But rather than readdressing the modes by which he consequently finds himself "incoherent", an approach which might transform panic into revelation,

⁹² *Notes from Underground*, 18.

⁹³ As Liza's actual, as opposed to fanciful, presence begins to panic him, the Underground Man notes " 'Living life' so crushed me, unaccustomed to it as I was, that it even became difficult for me to breathe" (*Notes from Underground*, 126). Her presence is "unbearably burdensome" (126), stifling the self-reliant and necessarily isolated habits which sustain and placate him.

⁹⁴ The Underground Man's notes are littered with allusive invocations of literary and historical templates; I have already discussed some of these passages and this habit at greater length. The particular allusions to which I have referred, George Sand, Manfred and Pushkin and Lermontov, are, respectively, at pages 111, 58 and 85. This habit of imitation, or self-employment along the lines of literary tropes and genre conventions, is particularly evident throughout nineteenth century literature. There are precedents, Don Quixote, for example, and the disorienting influence of fiction on readers of novels, particularly women, fuelled a good deal of suspicion and criticism of imaginative literature by English Augustans such as Johnson and Addison (in the same period Charlotte Lennox wrote *The Female Quixote*, updating the scenario of Quixote's *idée fixe* to the late 18th century and replacing Quixote's templates of literary chivalry with those of romantic novels). In the nineteenth century this tendency has its archetype in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which has given rise to the term 'Bovaryism' (or Bovarysme in French). In Bovaryism, as opposed to Quixoticism, there is prominent dissatisfaction with a reality that thwarts individuals' received notion of what constitutes a worthwhile existence. The world is rarely transformed in the way in which it is by Quixote's expansive solipsism, leaving the dual plot-lines of life-as-it-is, and life as the individual has come to feel they are entitled to experience it (as it appears in aesthetically romanticized and ready made renditions), locked together in mutual antipathy. The Underground Man is peculiar among the figures who are at the mercy of this kind of learnt dissatisfaction with ambivalent reality, because he is aware of his own disproportionate and unjustified dependence on versions of reality he has appropriated from art.

his disorientation and need for certainty drive him back to ready-made strategies of therapeutically overt meaning (duelling for one's honour, or saving exploited damsels from a heartless world, tropes which are travestied by his artificial motivations). Through these he realigns, affectedly, his sense of self with an impression of a world of higher meaning than the banalities of material subsistence, and sustains the assurances provided by received notions of 'living life'. These notions inhibit him, though, from recognising or valuing any other form of sequence, or assurance; he becomes isolated within the limited frame of ready-to-hand literary tropes of existence, behaviour and meaning, which he both despises and depends on. This dependence is, furthermore, abstracted from his particular existence, it orders it but there is no inter-relation. The Underground Man himself is able to play every part in these tropes, but never himself (too unliterary). In part that is the idea - a denial of his position in the world which disparagingly encompasses world and self equally - but it is also the source of his cynical aggression towards this habit of merely acting out a self-image he supposes might satisfy him.

The Underground Man admits to having wanted desperately to fall in love and, by his preconceived standards, to having succeeded twice in doing so. On these grounds, he proclaims the convoluted reality of the suffering his love exposed him to: "I did suffer, gentlemen, I assure you. Deep in one's soul it's hard to believe one is suffering, mockery is stirring there, but all the same I suffer, and in a real, honest-to-god way".⁹⁵ He suffers for his inability to suffer, or feel, in a way fitted by convention to whatever adventure he has imposed on himself. This suffering is out of "boredom", like the adventures he imposes it is necessary to fill up a void. He does so arbitrarily, and certainly with no concern beyond the limits of his own self, which, he suggests, merely appreciates the *divertissement* of recognisable (that is, literary) signs of an involvement in the living of a life. Even while playing out these roles of suffering, pleasure, and purpose, though, he suffers inwardly for the very fact that they are hollow rituals. Like the "point of honour" which the Underground Man considers unintelligible to a crowd of ordinary people, the credibility of his suffering is also dependent on his isolated approval of the context it seeks to validate itself in. The Underground Man seems uncertain whether his private torments equate to the external idea of genuine suffering, whether they are "real"; he is aware simultaneously that his discomfort is real and that beyond his special interest in himself it might not be.

⁹⁵ *Notes from Underground*, 17.

The Underground Man's cynicism suggests an incremental spitefulness: as the certainty which his penetration into the abstract foundations of his community aims ultimately to discover repeatedly fails to materialise, he is driven further and further into expressions of disillusion in the hope of arriving at a point of conviction (to be verified by the equilibrium of expectation and experience). Recurringly, sceptical idealists like the Underground Man recognise the intellectual credibility of a position Nietzsche later described and celebrated as the role of the disinterested scholar, but many idealist-sceptics are unable to harmonise with this position because ultimately they are not disinterested, no matter how hard they try to be.

Late in his career Dostoevsky recorded in his notebook the conviction that life was a continual effort of composition.⁹⁶ The Underground Man stands as an emblem of the futility of composing in a self-administered vacuum; his sense of control (which is little more than the practical imposition of approved patterns of "sense") is his only comfort; it necessarily isolates him, however, from any real (or at least genuine and original) emplotment. The underground man composes away from real life, it is not an explorative or speculative project but rather a consuming species of escapism which devolves into a lifetime of game-playing.

The Underground Man is offered as an example of the incapacity of secular narratives to compensate for the stagnation and sterility with which his continued preference for absolute certainty is infused by the sceptical individualism he relies on (ostensibly to keep him safe from factitious convictions). *Crime and Punishment* reveals the same poverty of secular convictions, but where the Underground Man remains bitterly dependent on artificial life, Raskolnikov abandons himself to reality's judgement, both of his particular desired certainty and of the impact of the desire for certainty on his relationship with an uncertain world. In the moral disorientation and displacement which proceeds through Raskolnikov's selective devaluation of those aspects of reality that do not comply with his personal needs, Dostoevsky anathematises what he considered an indicative spirit of the age.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ "Man does not live his whole life, but *composes himself*", quoted in *Dialogues with Dostoevsky* (Stanford University Press, 1993), 242. Jackson's reference is to one of Dostoevsky's notebooks; it is footnoted thus: "*F.M. Dostoevskij ob isskussve*, ed. S. Aleksandrov (Moscow, 1973), p.461"; fn 18 (cf ch.12), 329.

⁹⁷ From *The Idiot* onwards, Dostoevsky's deprecating representation of this 'spirit' becomes the life-blood of the worlds in which the characters exist and by which they are formed. The overt extremity and grotesque oddity of Mr. Golyadkin's (in *The Double*) and the Underground Man's distorted relationships with reality gives way to a more commonplace (and more insidious for the subtle corruptions this supports) distortion or disruption in the nature of individuals' interactions with an ambivalent external reality, including each other. For instance, intermingled with the trappings of the tragic heroine, Nastasya

Filippovna carries the stamp of the underground and the bourgeois duplicity of Golyadkin. Though Nastasya Filippovna's unsinkable pride means that her protestations of "me" and "not me" lack Golyadkin's pitiful sense of an irresistible external determination, they nevertheless recognise the same forces. In the devotion to surfaces displayed in their respective devotion to the status of carriages, they are quaintly and more concretely marked with a common affliction by individualistic materialism.

*"Instead of dialectics, there was life"¹ - Educating Emotive Preferences**Coercive Disruption*

In 1873, *A Writer's Diary* included "Vlas",² a meditation on the increasing instances of nihilistic tendencies disrupting the conventional moral framework of Russia's provincial youth. Dostoevsky updates the figure of Vlas from Nekrasov's poem of that name.³ The old Vlas had murdered his wife and lived among thieves and bandits until, repenting of worldly vanities after a vision of hell, he becomes a wandering beggar and pilgrim spreading the word of God. Dostoevsky's updated Vlas involves a young villager vying with his peers, out of pride and youthful one-up-manship, to undertake the most outrageous desecration of conformity they can think of. Vlas is led into a symbolic murder of Christ: a "Mephistopheles" among his peers commands him to save the Eucharist from a church service, place it on a stick and shoot it. As he fires, Vlas sees the Eucharist transform into a vision of Christ on the crucifix. He collapses and later, compelled to seek mortification, surrenders himself to a church elder for penance.

It is the "Vlases", suggests Dostoevsky, who, "repentant and unrepentant, will say the last word; they will say it and will show us a new path and a new way out of all those apparently insoluble tangles"⁴ - Vlases like himself, and like Raskolnikov: "let us remember Vlas and be calm: at the critical moment all the falsehood, if indeed it is falsehood, will burst forth from the People's hearts and confront them with incredible accusatory power".⁵ Throughout his later novels, Dostoevsky attempts to depict the partial and essentially unsupportive nature of secular ideals and moral codes. He demonstrates how individuals who are dependent on such ideals, when exposed to the dilemmas entailed in attempts at living idealistically (integrated with others yet without

¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1993), 550.

² Dostoevsky, "Vlas", *A Writer's Diary - Volume I, 1873-1876*, trans. Kenneth Lantz, (London: Quartet, 1994), 158-69.

³ Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov (1821-77) was a poet who concerned himself primarily with social issues and was closely affiliated with the radical social critics Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobrolyubov. Dostoevsky used an excerpt from Nekrasov's verse to lead into the second part of *Notes from Underground* ("Concerning the Wet Snow"). The association between the Underground Man's postured social conscience in his interactions with the prostitute Liza, and the kind of superficial and hypocritical lip-service Dostoevsky felt such 'critical' intentions as Nekrasov's sought unsuccessfully to dignify, places the two in a similar category of merely eloquent social outrage which does little more than spice up their respective modes of *divertissement*. The Underground Man at least despises his hollowness and insincerity, while the pompous sincerity of Nekrasov's poetic protests (Dostoevsky implies) suggests his obliviousness to the self-solacing facets of his radicalism and protests.

⁴ Dostoevsky, "Vlas", 160.

betraying their ideal), either gradually and reluctantly relinquish their individualistic devotion and the assurances it provides (as with Raskolnikov), or resort to hostility towards or isolation from the aspects of reality which proclaim the inadequacy of absolute idealism (as with Myshkin who, in spite of his outward benevolence, essentially refuses to exist in a world so antipathetic to his ideal conception of justice). Dostoevsky's vigorous exposure of the consequences that stem from individualists' dependence on subjectively ratified 'truths' emerges from their inadequacy as absolutes.

The weight of reality's intrusive disruptions, which eventually crush or 'exile' solipsistic worldviews in Dostoevsky's novels, does not proffer an affirmation of dialogic awareness, but a reversion to the distant *proper* authority of God. In this meditation on the agitation of provincial nihilists, and their potential threat to society, Dostoevsky essentially seeks to assure his readers that the nihilists' abuse of freedom is no cause for concern, as it will ultimately deliver them into dependence on traditional authority. Raskolnikov is the clearest example of this Vlas-ness, while the Underground Man implies Dostoevsky's explanation of why transgression and suffering are necessary to disclose the new path. "If he has the capacity to rise up out of his fallen state, then he exacts a terrible vengeance on himself for his past fall, an even more painful vengeance than he had exacted on others for the secret torments his own dissatisfaction with himself caused him while befogged in his degradation".⁶ The consequences of an incapacity to incite this regenerative rebellion or protest are apparent in the Underground Man's barren and bitter self-denigration.⁷ The stagnating

⁵ "Vlas", 168.

⁶ "Vlas", 163.

⁷ The role which feelings of guilt, repentance, and unforced moral 'surrender' can potentially play in clarifying the nature of peoples' tendency to feel and observe abstract moral qualms is the focus of a discussion in *The Idiot*. Amid millenarian interpretations of contemporary events as heralds of the apocalypse, Lebedev tells the story of a 12th century cannibal monk's sudden surrender to justice, and asks: "Who was it then who prompted him to denounce himself?" (*The Idiot*, 399).

Therein lies the solution! There must have been something stronger than the stake, the fire, even the habit of twenty years! There must have been an idea more powerful than any disaster, famine, torture, plague, leprosy, and all that hell which mankind could not have borne without that one binding idea which directed men's lives and fertilized the springs of life! ... Show me a force which binds today's humanity together with half the power it possessed in those centuries.

(399).

Lebedev's statement, "there is no more a binding principle" (399), perhaps amounts to little more than the nostalgia of hindsight, or a wilful blindness to the false closure of retrospective perspectives. The form misleads him, he recognises the traumas of that era, and that at such a time a binding directive was probably something of a necessity. The challenges in his own time are ostensibly different (not famine, leprosy and plague for instance), but are the anxieties? Lebedev's contemporary uncertainty of metaphysical place and meaning seems an unprecedented confusion because they have not been encoded, explained or historicised in the way that the twelfth century fanaticism has; this is intrinsic to their nature, they are challenges of self-conscious incomprehension and inarticulateness. The process of *Crime and*

scepticism of the Underground Man's radical doubt and his need for an explicit purpose together confine him to a dependence on ersatz realities which he despises but cannot replace or dismiss.

Dostoevsky borrowed a word from drafting, *Stushevatsia* (to fade to nothing), to describe the gradual erasure of individual personality or identity under the anonymous bureaucratic organisation of individually meaningless work. Dostoevsky's notion of fading to nothing reflects a process (against which Raskolnikov, for instance, rebels, leaving him fading to nothing at a different extreme in the meaninglessness of his isolation) whereby desires and expectations which are central to individuals' self-perceptions are gradually rendered inadmissible to their actual existence among others: individuals are reduced to their official function, as in "A Weak Heart", and even lose themselves, as in *The Double*, in juggling the contradictory demands of worldly ambition and abstract ideals of personal dignity. These characters struggle with an uncertain dependence on publicly approved roles, which they neither feel emotionally bound to nor are able to reject. Alternatively, and as is more often the case in Dostoevsky's characterisations of the distorted individuals which such circumstances produce, the particular characters become embroiled in solipsistic resistance to external reality's judgement of their worth and role. Rather than fading to nothing, the self-images of these characters encourage them to eclipse reality by selectively denying the pertinence (that is, the essential reality) of the compromised actions reality in fact demands of them (which are rightly denied, they feel, as not relating to their "real me", or essential self).

The emotional and financial impoverishment which leads Raskolnikov to his crime is initially wilful and almost self-inflicted; his flight into destitution galvanises his right to a revulsion from reality. He seems intuitively to recognise that the kind of moral freedom he envisages represents an alternative state of being, not a 'human' moral state at all, and which one cannot *choose* to participate in.⁸ In accordance, he

Punishment, Raskolnikov's eventual concession to and approval of the moral dictates of community, effectively answers Lebedev's challenge. Addressing the confusion over the nature and reality of man's "moral-side", Dostoevsky notes adamantly: "despite all your arguments about the non-existence of man's moral side - it exists. And that is just where all the power is." (*The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-81), Volume II*, 10). It is the light of this underlying certainty (which is troubled but not extinguished by ambiguity) that Dostoevsky allows gradually to dawn across the seemingly disordered worlds of his novels.

⁸ I shall be discussing Dostoevsky's implicit construction of a moral category determining human and inhuman beings, among biologically human individuals, later in this section. It is of course possible and not at all uncommon, for humans to act in an 'inhuman' manner, but any human that does not acknowledge moral boundaries will tend to find themselves punished for any incursions against the

attempts to divest himself of the attachments and obligations which might keep him from or challenge the rationalised impunity which his theory provisionally grants him. At the same time this drift into alienation, or the underground, offers a posture in which Raskolnikov's refusal to consent to what he considers the unjustly limiting obligations society requires of him personally, and his evasion of the compromises which fair relationships with others would reveal beneath his idealised self image (eg. parasitic shiftless son) can be envisaged by him as proof of his transcendence from a lesser sphere of existence.

Unexpected feelings of guilt and shame are fundamental to Raskolnikov's reluctant awakening to his dependence on moral boundaries. The coming into focus of Raskolnikov's guilt dismisses the ambiguous ethical numbness of his intellectual denial of moral boundaries, leaving genuine remorse and a morally reorienting surrender to external and shared patterns of culpability and penance.

Initially, it is not a sense of sin or criminality to which Raskolnikov responds, but the raw experience of exclusion and separateness. In this state, Raskolnikov's moralising self-justifications and confessions conform essentially to a conventional inclination to locate valid moral orientation through agreement (a kind of deliberate or conscious scrutiny of his solipsistic values which seeks to incorporate external responses to them). Even when Raskolnikov has lost faith in his entitlement to sin, but still rejects the jurisdiction of any conventional sentence,⁹ he explains to Sonya *how* he came to commit the crime, the circumstances that generated it, "Then I realized, Sonya ... that power is given only to the one who dares to reach down and take it".¹⁰ Raskolnikov consistently seeks to contextualise his actions (even when he begins to feel they were wrong) in such a way that they might appear somehow circumstantially justified, or at least

standards of humans who do recognise such bounds. Though they might reject the morality of such punishments they are unlikely to escape them on these grounds. Alternatively an individual who rejects morality might retreat into seclusion, like Conrad's Axel Heyst, but when other people become involved and mutual consequences and explanations become necessary something recognisably resembling moral rights and obligations will tend to resurface. In Heyst's case, though, his retreat from the hollow laws of Western tradition, a rejection which compels him to exist in a state of conscious quarantine from its manifestations, rejects a particular type of moral structure but does so from a position of idealistic moral disdain. Heyst does not so much deny the imperative of moral structures, but rather places himself in a position where he will not be called upon to invoke, apply or adhere to 'moral' conventions which he considers inherently corrupt or hollow. He has no alternative so he must isolate himself from the prospect of any morally contentious event.

⁹ "How am I guilty before *them*?", he challenges Sonya (*Crime and Punishment*, 420, my italics).

¹⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 418.

understandable, and perhaps even excusable. He seeks Sonya's complicity in this project, but is forced instead to silence her dissent.

Raskolnikov's reliance on proud defiance of external judgement becomes stronger as the criminal investigation proceeds; it is a hostile and contingent response and a shelter against the intrusive prospect of being understood and judged by others. Like the ideological armour that hardens around acts of revolution, Raskolnikov's theoretical expressions of justified rebellion harden around him after the crime. Certainly their substance, the logic and the presumptions, existed before, but now they are not just abstract arguments but necessary emotional stanchions.

This is evident in Raskolnikov's conversation with Zamyotov in the 'Crystal Palace', where he teasingly recounts his hiding the trinkets under the rock as something thoroughly premeditated and, as such, a credit to his self-possession in the midst of severe transgression. It is a fabricated detail that nevertheless allows Raskolnikov to experimentally retune his recollections of what was in truth a fraught and half-conscious fiasco to comply with his notion of cold-blooded deftness. In its inception Raskolnikov's account is self-indulgent bravado, a front to defy Zamyotov, but through this and similar fronts Raskolnikov trials hopeful explanations in which he might recognise a credible and *desirable* explanation of what took place. While evading the forces of conventional morality, Raskolnikov is able to entertain the image of himself as a superior man. This image, then, is founded on his awareness of having committed a crime; without this awareness he cannot luxuriate in the extraordinariness of his literal impunity (he hasn't been caught). As his proud conviction in his superiority fades, this simple expression of his status is debased; it becomes the empty last resort, a diverting indulgence in individual competitiveness. Though this last resort never solidifies into a convincing proof it is a necessary aid in forestalling the flood of guilt which threatens to fill up the empty void of his separateness. Ultimately though, his dependence on competitiveness to prompt the postures of resistance necessary to his act of moral rebellion, merely confirms the hollow reactionary pettiness of the arguments he is forced to rely on to meet his desire to perceive his isolation as triumphal. Gradually, the yearnings and anxieties which challenge this desired triumph come to offer a source of moral directives and worthy compromises which his abstract distemper and his rational rebellion had initially failed to reckon with and were later unable to dispel or discredit.

Putting the rhetoric of 'stepping over' aside, Raskolnikov's main compulsion in proposing and committing the murder of the money lender (aside from his desire for quick money) appears to be his desperation to cast-off the disorientation and complete

disaffection into which he is sinking. Finding that convention, received truth, and his own rational intellect are unable to furnish him with anything that can satisfy or stand up to his dissatisfied scepticism, Raskolnikov has been unable to affirm grounds for the kind of singularly authoritative moral code he desires. He has no established grounds either, therefore, from which to condemn or order merely contingent impulses and appetites.

In the number of justifications which Raskolnikov flirts with prior to and after his violent personal revolt, it becomes apparent that essentially he had reacted *against uncertainty* rather than with any clear positive confidence in a specific path of cause and effect. Raskolnikov's crime is a speculative protest against an uncertain and complex moral scene. The persistence of emotional, intellectual and moral reactions incompatible with those required by his 'theory', testifies to a reality in which the laziness and culpability of his attempt to empower himself through the suffering of others can only be made over as the privilege of a higher moral category through special pleading against fact. The principles which theoretically induce his crime are inadequate to explain and guide him through the reality it precipitates. The blunt and panicked logic of Dmitry Karamazov's "everything is permitted" suggests a similar compounding of feelings of uncertainty, hysteria and abandonment into a supposedly rational denunciation of moral ties.¹¹ Raskolnikov's fatalistic acquiescence in the idea of murder, and his feelings of being only partly present in its execution, emphasise the awkward uncertainty that precedes (and follows) his surrender to an unconvinced and essentially experimental translation of ideas into activity. Though he carries his experiment out to the letter, placing himself outside moral conventions, Raskolnikov is never fully convinced or committed to it; he does not *believe* in its terms, but is trying to

¹¹ The sense of deprivation that descends on idealists bereft of an authority they had considered to exist as an external guiding presence seems often to distort their perception of the moral character of a merely human ethics and to inhibit their capacity to assert even the same moral categories and judgements as being still worthy of observation. In *Dipsychus and The Spirit*, Dipsychus relates a dream in which God has died (1.7.7-129). He bitterly recounts scenarios of inconstancy and the dissolution of bonds of trust, honour and fidelity between people. "O pretty girl, who trippiest along / Come to my bed, it isn't wrong" (1.7.19-20), though later, pleasure fades, "a silly girl is a poor friend" (1.7.24) and the consequences, to Dipsychus, seem a comfortless partnership or the loneliness of separation. Indifference to others no longer offend God, because "Dong, there is no God; dong" (1.7.14). "No justice here; no God above; / But where we are is there not love[?] / What? what? thou also go'st? For how / Should dead truth live in lover's vow [?]" (1.7.114-17). How then, Dipsychus seems to challenge the unbelieving world, can this offensive dissolution be condemned and rectified? He ignores, though, the possibility of turning his own persisting moral feelings - his outrage, and his despair at the loss of external justifications for his outrage - into something more, a starting point for secular moral guidelines, for example. But what his bitter and disdainful regret really signifies is the antipathy to partial and pragmatic moral guidelines by which such complaints are often motivated. Dipsychus feels approval for the same moral standards as had been dictated by God's law, but his practical allegiance to them is troubled by his inability to call upon any platform of external authority and dictates to validate and ratify these standards as sound and good.

prove their existence. Raskolnikov's self-abandonment to the tempering and mediation of concrete consequences makes it clear that, however he contextualises the goal of his actions, he is compelled equally to flee uncertainty (Holquist notes a similar compulsiveness, but instead emphasises the allure of what he feels is Raskolnikov's goal - discovering his identity). Raskolnikov forces the wheels into motion in order that an objective external force will evaluate his actions and reactions and deliver a verdict in relation to which the dimensions of his self, which have proved so fathomless to internal speculation, will begin to assume concrete form. That is, weighed down by his doubts, speculations, fantasies, fears and desires, Raskolnikov forces himself into a train of events which will take the measuring out of his own hands; he incites an external process and defers to history to provide him with a plot or case history in which to discover himself.¹²

Raskolnikov's simultaneous fascination with, and uncertainty about, his relationship to his crime provides him with a potent stimulus to find a meaning in the act and its subsequent effects. Michael Holquist observes, "Raskolnikov is forced to take up a new role, that of detective of his old self's motive, in order to create a new identity, a new life for himself".¹³ The manner of Raskolnikov's response to this stimulation, however, is more accurately one of flight than detection. Though ostensibly hunting out or investigating the profile of his crime Raskolnikov is seeking rationales capable of dismissing accusations he cannot afford to admit. He is not hunting for truth but for the plausibility of a particular desired explanation. After the murder Raskolnikov looks through the newspapers "greedily" and with "convulsive impatience" for information on the crime.¹⁴ In the hypothetical account he then gives to Zamyotov, he proposes another image of the crime, and later his return to the scene seems a further attempt to locate some point of certainty about his role in the crime and its implications. There is something inevitably token about Raskolnikov's various

¹² In *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, Michael Holquist suggests that "Accepting history as the ultimate source of meaning, [Raskolnikov] can find no way to appeal its verdict ... the sequence the moment of his crime has condemned him to is final" (92-93). Holquist suggests Raskolnikov was "seeking to gain a new identity by his own actions" (93). But the idea of history he relies on is not the latent significance in experiencing a real course of events (the "experience" of history), rather, it is the idealised and iconic residue of historical actions, bronze statues and immortality. It is Dostoevsky not Raskolnikov who uses the effect of "history" to answer Raskolnikov's uncertain attempt to provoke a feeling of certainty. And again, his surrender to equivocation by concrete events is made under the influence of strong desires and preferences relating to the ideal outcome of his test. He is not seeking to gain just any new identity, but rather to verify (or otherwise) his right to the identity he already imagines himself entitled to. The verdict he ultimately comes to accept is of little importance without the drawn out campaign he wages in an attempt to absolve himself of his responsibility to admit its aptness. This campaign reflects his resistance, in allegiance to his desired worldview, to objectively naming the stimuli he is swamped by in the aftermath of his crime and his evasion of the clear implications of his moral position which these carry.

¹³ Holquist, *Dostoevsky and The Novel*, 88.

explanations which seems to indicate that their value lies not in their potential capacity to reveal his “self”, but in offering him a diversion from the implications of the moral force which the world of the novel brings quite relentlessly to bear. Holquist’s suggestion that Raskolnikov is both hunter and hunted is true in this sense but the significance of his hunt is determined by his awareness of pursuit and essentially constitutes the search for a place to hide. Raskolnikov hunts the circumstances before, during and after the crime for an angle from which he can repudiate his guilt and shelter his pride with notions of efficacy. The appeal to the authority of bronze statues unleashes a benign (in this instance) Bronze Horseman,¹⁵ a relentless force of accusation, in flight from which he relies on his detection to disprove its jurisdiction. Raskolnikov’s quest for self-knowledge in the aftermath of the crime pits him against the tangible world of circumstance and other characters; it is not a quest for real knowledge but a quest to discover credible explanations capable of verifying desired images of the self and of reality. It is in the failure of this quest, or rather in Raskolnikov’s abandonment of it having realised its cost, that he becomes *able* to recognise and accept the feelings of accusation and condemnation as evidence of the existence and vitality of the communal moral force he had tried to outpace, and of his fundamental sympathy with it.

An Exemplary Tale

You feel that this (the world, the stars) is not above your understanding and for the happiness of feeling this you have to lose nothing more than your human face.¹⁶

This note follows a short prayer: “Lord, I thank you for the face of a man Thou hast given me. (In contrast to suicides)”.¹⁷ Dostoevsky implies, here as in his work, that the

¹⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 159.

¹⁵ Beneath Raskolnikov’s reverence for the men of bronze, there is an undertone of the tyrannical totalitarianism associated with the bronze statue of Peter the Great. In Pushkin’s “The Bronze Horseman”, an anonymous and essentially benevolent ‘little man’ called Eugene (a name in which Edmund Wilson, in “In Honour of Pushkin” (*The Triple Thinkers* (London: John Lehmann, 1952), 37-63), perceived the hint of a link to Pushkin’s more famous Eugene Onegin), loses everything he cares for and all his “roots” in one of Petersburg’s serial floods (Wilson’s essay includes a translation of the work, see pages 56-63). Peter’s artificial city, it would seem, is destined to undermine the attempts of its citizens to mature beyond a direct dependence on the patronising and infantilising ministrations of the totalitarian Tsarist state. After the flood, Eugene confronts the statue of Peter. The statue seems to move; under Eugene’s dissatisfied challenge its static authority transforms into a pervasive threat. Eugene runs through the streets driven on by the sound of hooves behind him. Raskolnikov’s desire to emulate the men of bronze is formulated from a feeling, similar to Eugene’s, of unjust oppression, Raskolnikov’s solution, though, is predominantly influenced by his pride and egotism.

posture of the omniscient man-god, to which Raskolnikov appears at times to aspire, depends on an inhuman isolation which he ultimately cannot tolerate or approve.¹⁸

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor writes:

In the light of our understanding of identity, the portrait of an agent free from all frameworks rather spells for us a person in the grip of an appalling identity crisis. Such a person wouldn't know where he stood on issues of fundamental importance, would have no orientation in these issues whatever, wouldn't be able to answer for himself on them.¹⁹

Where this absence is not experienced as a "lack", then, one has a picture of "frightening dissociation".²⁰ Taylor's understanding of identity is of course particular, cohering around his proposition of a human agent's inescapable orientation to a socially embedded "good".

Raskolnikov's intention, to demonstrate that he *does* know 'where he stands', proves the opposite. It is precisely the discrepancy between the fact of Raskolnikov's

¹⁶ Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-61)*, Volume II, 106.

¹⁷ *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-61)*, Volume II, 106.

¹⁸ I use "human" here not as an objective factual term, (and not, therefore, as a blindly optimistic exaggeration of the benevolent civilising capacities of individuals and groups) but as denoting a state determined by the acceptance of an obligation to ground abstract moral decisions and convictions in consideration and awareness of an actual group of other beings to which it also pertains. In relations to this group one can be held accountable for both good and bad decisions, productive or destructive, but the kind of impunity of being beyond morality becomes a simply alien state rather than a transcendent progression. Raskolnikov tries to be inhuman but finds he in fact does not favour the conditions inhumanity demands; he is not prepared to surrender the rights and privileges he has himself travestied in rejecting his own obligation to the world of others. In sympathy with the implications Dostoevsky attaches to the term, I use it qualitatively; a usage which is particularly apt for the pejorative emphasis it gives to the antitheses of what Dostoevsky's biases approve as "human", such as individualism and materialism.

In September 1865, Dostoevsky wrote to the publisher Katkov about the nature of moral reawakening Raskolnikov's crime engenders:

Insoluble questions arise before the murderer; unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart. God's justice, earthly law, comes into its own, and he finishes by being *compelled* to denounce himself. Compelled, so as to become linked to people again, even at the price of perishing at penal servitude; the feeling of separation and alienation from humanity that came over him immediately after committing the crime has worn him out with torment.

(*Complete Letters, Volume Three 1860-67*, trans. David A. Lowe (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1989), letter 266, 175).

Subservience to moral agreement and the communal moral values it instates, then, becomes a kind of criterion for the participation in a kind of communal moral care which does not deprive Raskolnikov of 'character' and freedom but is the fundamental facilitator in enabling him to recognise and esteem these qualities.

For Dostoevsky, transgression and immorality are not inhuman, but the kind of subsequent remorselessness on which Raskolnikov had intended to found his future, is.

¹⁹ Taylor, *Sources of The Self*, 31.

²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of The Self*, 31.

situation and the boundlessness of will that Nietzsche claims for his *übermensch* that roots him to the ground. But this discrepancy is not particular to Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky gives it a broad human relevance. A superman of the kind Raskolnikov aims to prove himself would not be a better human, it would not be a human at all. Dostoevsky implies that this kind of impunity from conventional moral categories is only attainable by individuals who are willing and able to surrender themselves to complete self-reliance and isolation; to forgo the human face.

Throughout *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov's awareness of his incapacity and essential reluctance to surrender himself in this fashion dislodges his commitment to his idealised self-image that depends on them, and demonstrates to the initially evasive Raskolnikov where he actually stands. This is accompanied by the simultaneous emergence of Raskolnikov's responsibility to "answer for himself".

He was indeed ashamed even before Sonya, whom he tormented because of it with his contemptuous and rude treatment. But he was ashamed not of a shaved head and chains: his pride was badly wounded; and it was from wounded pride that he fell ill. ... he judged himself severely and his hardened conscience did not find any especially terrible guilt in his past, except perhaps a simple *blunder* that could have happened to anyone. He was ashamed precisely because he, Raskolnikov, had perished so blindly, hopelessly, vainly, and stupidly ...²¹

Raskolnikov has cut himself off from a possibility he nevertheless still considers himself inherently entitled to: he judges himself in relation to his fidelity to the authority he invests in his idea, dismissing any actual signs of incompetence or failure as reality's wrongful deviation from the terms of his ideal.

Unlike the impersonal judgements of conventional "authority", the judgements Raskolnikov imagines his mother, Dunya, or Razumikhin might make cannot so readily be disparaged. The disquiet provoked by his inability to attain the sympathetic understanding of any individual he respects, esteems or otherwise wishes to be understood by, begins to suggest to him that while the superficial forms of conventional morality seem stale and rigid, they are formed and underpinned by a conduit of moral support and orientation to others for which he discovers a strong desire.

Similarly, Porfiry Petrovich's psychological tactics and taunts (aside from demonstrating an intimacy with and sympathy for his predicament beyond the mere

²¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 543.

detection and capture of a murderer²²) impose feelings of incompetence and inferiority on Raskolnikov. Raskolnikov had banked on meeting his pursuers and accusers with the composure and impervious self-conviction of a higher being; in Porfiry's company, though, he is the scolded raw youth, brooding and sullenly rebelling against the evidence of his naïvete.

... you're not one to be afraid or ashamed of confessing your guilt."

"Ehh, I spit on it!" Raskolnikov whispered scornfully and with loathing, as though he did not even wish to speak. He again made a move to get up, as if he wanted to go somewhere, but again sat down in visible despair.

"You spit on it, really! You've lost your faith and you think I'm crudely flattering you; but how much have you lived so far? How much do you understand? He came up with a theory, and now he's ashamed because it didn't work, because it came out too unoriginally!"²³

On learning of the crime Sonya immediately understands the implication Raskolnikov has been trying to avoid, "What, what have you done to yourself!"²⁴ Sonya, like Porfiry Petrovich and Svidrigailov, intuitively perceives Raskolnikov as the victim of his own actions and of the idea behind them.

"And live, how will you live? What will you live with?" Sonya exclaimed. "Is it possible now? How will you talk to your mother? (Oh, and them, what will become of them now!) But what am I saying! You've already abandoned your mother and sister. You have, you've already abandoned them. Oh, Lord!" she cried, "he already knows it all himself! But how, how can one live with no human being! What will become of you now?"²⁵

²² Porfiry Petrovich is aware of Raskolnikov's frustrated, ambitious self-interest and his frustrated desire to undertake a genuinely higher cause, which are compounded to precipitate his crime. It is not that Porfiry sympathises with or approves of any particular aspect of Raskolnikov's theory, though, but rather with the impulse that drove Raskolnikov to formulate it in the first place: he recognises in Raskolnikov someone who, in spite of the travesty he came up with, was seeking, though not solely or without corruption, to develop a credible cause to which he could surrender himself, and therein a willingness to. His crime and manner have about them the trappings of thought, of a paradoxical moral application, which conveys Raskolnikov's commitment to a moral discourse. This commitment is redeemable; it can be rehabilitated. Porfiry's manner towards Raskolnikov reflects the kind of anguished sympathy which Prince Myshkin demonstrates in his diagnoses of the nature and proliferation of Russian atheism. It also closely resembles Dostoevsky's own feelings about the crimes and criminals he attributed to the modern secular ideals of radical youths throughout the 1860s and 1870s. In his famous concern for Russia's little boys and girls, Dostoevsky is at his most avuncular and sympathetic, while in the more strident tones he employs throughout *A Writer's Diary* his refusal to tolerate the consequences of individuals' devotion to their 'new words' is to the fore.

²³ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 459.

²⁴ *Crime and Punishment*, 411.

²⁵ *Crime and Punishment*, 420.

Ultimately, Raskolnikov's idealism cannot dissolve his human ties, and therein the proof of his humanity, or provide him with the kind of support these offer.²⁶

In contrast to Raskolnikov's disorientation and irascibility, Razumikhin is given a stability and internal assurance. Neither cloyingly spiritual nor complacently moralistic, Razumikhin seems to be inherently good, and he is given all the good things from which Raskolnikov systematically estranges himself.²⁷ Rather than falling into disrepute through Raskolnikov's determination to disown them (as mere sentimental ballast, for instance, or the stifling comforts of conformity), these qualities (essentially a family bond, and the mutual regard and nourishing of care) thus remain valuable. Raskolnikov's intention of placing himself above such ordinary concerns results only in a separation which, if anything, raises these banalities well above his compromised reach. "I wanted to tell you ... as I was coming here ... I wanted to tell you, mama ... and you, Dunya, that it's better if we part ways for a while. ... Whatever happens to

²⁶ Myshkin, by contrast, proceeds towards a catastrophic affirmation of the inhuman incoherence of his abstract idealism. Raskolnikov's own moral sense is maintained by a similar instinct to Myshkin's; and, accordingly, fails for the same reason that Myshkin's fails. In both, it is the failure to recognise or value the fertile coercive influence of an actual community and respond to the field of agreement which condemns the idealistic vision each character seeks to promote. In *The Idiot*, though, this field is tainted with implications of bourgeois individualism, and approval for its corrective imperviousness to Myshkin's individualistic supplication is tempered and almost withheld (in *Crime and Punishment* this qualification is unnecessary as Raskolnikov, not the community, is the carrier of the corrupting principles of western individualism). Though Myshkin's failure to successfully communicate with his audience stands as a legitimate condemnation of his program, the condemnation encompasses both the scene, and the incapacity to be flexible which is revealed as fundamental to Myshkin's intentions.

Myshkin's unlimited, and primarily indiscriminate, compassion is frequently the source of a disruptive indulgence of other characters' idealistic desires. Though welcomed at first, Myshkin's indulgent compassion is ultimately disruptive as it affirms others' desires and ideals not as gestures of abstract orientation or subjectively meaningful codes of conduct, but as worldly possibilities regardless of their unworldly terms. Myshkin's compassionate reinforcement of symbolic expressions as potential truth perpetuates the dissatisfied antipathy towards, or righteous retreat from, secular reality which absolutist idealism necessitates in the secular world. Nastasya Filippovna, for instance, turns Myshkin's first marriage proposal away, in spite of her recognition that he was the saviour she'd been waiting for: "And did you really think I'd ruin a babe-in-arms like that?" (*The Idiot*, 179). Nastasya reveres her ideal and preserves it by keeping it separate: her dream has seemingly come true but this dream is an expression not a request, fruition is not its point. Myshkin's promise of that desired fulfilment forces a sharp re-evaluation of the proper value of idealistic orientation; idealism expresses a relationship with reality, but cannot hope to control or satisfactorily circumscribe it.

²⁷ Razumikhin's name suggests a fond diminutive of *razum*, meaning "reason"; the intended effect of which, as suggested by Professor Iain Wright (in conversation), might be something like "little-Mr-Reasonable". In *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-71*, Joseph Frank notes the resonance of Razumikhin's name, suggesting that Razumikhin is Dostoevsky's gesture to the warm and spontaneous qualities of a living flexible reason, and a corrective to the kind of disinterested utilitarianism with which rational clarity was stereotypically associated (99). In *Dostoevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*, Richard Peace notes further: "Razumikhin jokingly says that his name is 'Vrazumikhin' (i.e. from *vrazumit'* = 'to knock sense into someone'): see *D.5*, p.125. Luzhin, unable to remember Razumikhin's name correctly, calls him 'Rassudkin' (i.e. from *rassudok* = 'reason', 'intellect'): see *D.5*, p.313. Svidrigailov carries on this idea when he says that Razumikhin's name suggests that he is 'a man of reason' (i.e. *rassuditel'nyy*), and that he must be a seminarist: see *D.5*, p.496" (note 4, 313). Peace's page references relate to a Russian edition of Dostoevsky's collected works: F.M. Dostoyevsky, *Sobraniye sochineniy v desyati tomakh* (Moscow, 1956).

me, whether I perish or not, I want to be alone. Forget me altogether. It's better ...".²⁸ Thus Raskolnikov announces his exile and tries to depart; his mother's and sister's outcry dampens his resolve and, agreeing to return, he leaves. Razumikhin follows Raskolnikov who has waited to speak with him, "I knew you'd come running ... Go back to them and be with them ... Be with them tomorrow, too ... and always. I'll come ... maybe ... if I can".²⁹ Raskolnikov's appointment of Razumikhin as caretaker of his loved ones serves Dostoevsky's moral purpose by allowing this sudden hostility to familial tenderness to be particularised. Raskolnikov's mother reciprocates, deeming Razumikhin "Providence" and declaring that she regards him "as one of our family".³⁰ By mutual association, Raskolnikov's mother, Dunya and Razumikhin, maintain the presence of a symbolic community in relation to which Raskolnikov's isolation appears a state of deprivation, not "privilege". Raskolnikov here is quite clearly the victim of his actions rather than the world historical victor triumphing with disdain.

One new, insurmountable sensation was gaining possession of him almost minute by minute: it was a certain boundless almost physical loathing for everything he met or saw around him, an obstinate spiteful, hate filled loathing. All the people he met were repulsive to him – their faces, their walk, their movements were repulsive.³¹

In *The Double* Mr Golyadkin has a nightmare in which the city streets are populated solely with replica Golyadkins; he panics; every encounter confronts him with the image of Golyadkin as he is, and declares the absence of Golyadkin as he would be. Raskolnikov's hostility stems from a similar root, everything and everybody, he feels, implicitly accuse him of either fraud or failure. His overt hostility to a reality that persistently deviates from his conception of how it should rightly be, allows him initially to moor himself by maintaining the credibility of his basic conceptual foundations. Raskolnikov experiences all discrepancies between his own worldview and conventional reality both as accusations and as signs of his entitlement to oppose the latter. For one so dependent on making a particular sense of his circumstances, differences of opinion are similarly dangerous; for Raskolnikov, unmediated interactions with others holds the possibility of encountering unsympathetic worldviews. When Raskolnikov confesses to Sonya, she responds provocatively to the

²⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 313.

²⁹ *Crime and Punishment*, 313.

³⁰ *Crime and Punishment*, 221.

³¹ *Crime and Punishment*, 110.

rationalisations he proffers: "Nothing, he understands nothing!".³² His need to evade or defy Sonya's dissent galvanises and is subsequently reinforced by a further resort to extremes of merely asserted certainty: "I know everything. I thought it all out and whispered it all out when I was lying there in the dark ... I argued it all out with myself, to the last little trace, and I know everything, everything!".³³

While confessing to Sonya, Raskolnikov appears "in some sort of gloomy ecstasy. (Indeed, he had not talked with anyone for a very long time!) Sonya understood that this gloomy catechism had become his faith and law".³⁴ Raskolnikov guards his law accordingly:

"To kill? The right to kill?" Sonya clasped her hands.

"Ahh, Sonya!" he cried irritably, and was about to make some objection to her, but remained scornfully silent. "Don't interrupt me, Sonya!"³⁵

The scornfully closed nature of Raskolnikov's explanation is an indicator of its vulnerability; like the pawnbroker in "The Meek Girl" he requires a barrier between himself and the implications of external judgement. The self-censorship of his confession is an irony that points to Raskolnikov's own incomplete awareness of the nature of his guilt.

Primarily, Raskolnikov does not experience his own transgression or immorality, he simply experiences isolation; the approval of moral criteria comes as the necessary adjunct to regaining a voice in human affairs. "If the room were now suddenly filled not with policemen but with his foremost friends, even then, he thought, he would be unable to find a single human word for them, so empty had his heart suddenly become".³⁶ His emptiness is not the *sang-froid* or indifference of a superior moral vantage, but seems rather to reflect a necessary silencing or denial of various rationalisations, feelings, ideas and arguments going on within him which he cannot acknowledge, both for the fact that they reflect his continuing uncertainty and imperfect conviction, and for their particular implications of his sin.

In counterpoint to the emotional squalor and despair into which Raskolnikov's experimental transgression delivers him, the interactions between Razumikhin, Dunya, Raskolnikov's mother, Porfiry Petrovich and Svidrigailov communicate the persistence and advantages of the moral 'functions' Raskolnikov had sought to deny. These

³² *Crime and Punishment*, 418.

³³ *Crime and Punishment*, 418.

³⁴ *Crime and Punishment*, 418.

³⁵ *Crime and Punishment*, 419.

relationships convey the character of a 'larger world' - a world of people and interaction rather than mere hollow conventions and unthinking conformity – which re-emerges from the shadow of Raskolnikov's 'theory' and alters the emotivist foundations of his idealistic convictions and commitment. Raskolnikov's emotional retuning takes place at the hands of an impersonal force of moral coercion. While its substance appears ideological its form and process are less so, developing Raskolnikov's recognition of the contingent character of individual conviction rather than his convinced affiliation to a single and particular manifestation of these strategies.

The sense of failure which comes to tell psychologically against Raskolnikov's attempts to rationalise away his guilt stems not from his faltering loyalty to the theory with which initially he had so fiercely aligned himself (this, after all, proves a chimera), but rather from his awakening to the compromised vision which had facilitated his theories of impunity and the trial he made in their name. Though Raskolnikov briefly seeks to isolate himself from realities which might force him to acknowledge and confront the implications of his confused and troubled conscience, the moral appetite implicit in his desire to rationalise, one way or another, his crime drives him reluctantly towards his fellows, and towards an admission of his dependence on them, rather than away from them into a necessarily solipsistic exile. The problems which secular moral discourse inherits from absolutist models such as divine authority (or Platonic Ideals), are taken by Dostoevsky to reflect a corrosive inadequacy intrinsic to any attempt to deal in secular absolutes. The circumstantial coincidence (orchestrated by Dostoevsky) of the profanity of these absolutes and their detrimental incapacity to fulfil their supposed intentions, therefore, recommends the unifying order of supernatural faith as an object of devotion worth striving to keep.

The narrator of Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* (1860-62) describes a desperate relationship between the incarcerated and the wishful hopes that sustained them:

This habitual restlessness, which was displayed silently but obviously, this strange, impatient fervour of involuntarily expressed hopes which were at times so divorced from reality that they resembled a kind of delirium and which, perhaps most strikingly of all, persisted in men of the most hard-headed intelligence – all this created an extraordinary atmosphere in the place ... One somehow felt at once, almost at first glance, that there was nothing like this outside the prison.³⁷

³⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 103.

³⁷ Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*, trans. David McDuff; 1985, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 303.

It is exactly this atmosphere which Dostoevsky evokes as the characteristic milieu of communities over-populated with prisoners of their own individualism. Dostoevsky introduces these deliriums and absurd hopes, which “were possibly [prison’s] most characteristic feature”, into the world at large as the measure of a type of incarceration intrinsic to a society that replaces external authority with the deification of principles of material individualism.³⁸

Here everyone was a dreamer, and this was immediately obvious. The place had a morbid feel to it, stemming from the fact that this daydreaming made most of the convicts look sullen and morose, and somehow unhealthy. By far the greater number of them were silent and malicious to the point of hatred and did not like to display their hopes openly. Forthrightness and frankness were held in contempt. The more unrealizable were the hopes of these men, and the stronger their own sense of their unrealizability, the more stubbornly and chastely they would keep them to themselves, unable, however, to renounce them.³⁹

Dostoevsky’s analysis of his fellow prisoners’ necessary delusions suggests a relationship between the hostile solipsism of individuals’ monologic self-esteem and a condition of essential incarceration. The obvious unhealthiness of Dostoevsky’s dreamers and ambitious campaigners reflects the exiling selectivity of ideological infatuation.

The ideologue and the dreamer are would-be tyrants; held back by conscience, cowardice or convention, they are redeemable. “The human being and the citizen perish forever in the tyrant, and a return to human dignity, to repentance, to regeneration becomes practically impossible for him”.⁴⁰ It is Raskolnikov’s long-lived inability to sense “a profound lie in himself and in his convictions” that stands between him and the possibility of “his future resurrection, his future new vision of life”.⁴¹ Almost to the end Raskolnikov seeks to defend the credibility of his theory regardless of his inadequacy to enact it: “Instead he allowed only for the dull burden of instinct here, which it was not

³⁸ *The House of the Dead*, 303.

³⁹ *The House of the Dead*, 304.

⁴⁰ *The House of the Dead*, 242.

⁴¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 545. The Russian word ‘*prestuplenie*’, which is translated as ‘crime’ in the title of the novel, is effectively over and step, in moral terms it refers to the stepping outside, or transgression, of moral bounds. Raskolnikov’s recurring meditations on his capacity to step over, and his formulation of his experiment in these terms, picks up therefore, this resonance from the title. It is perhaps as if he were deliberately stripping the terms of their moral overtone, to enable him as it were to act transgressively, stepping over, without having to acknowledge his accountability in any terms other than the practical bare facts of stepping over and remaining unpunished.

for him to break through, and which (again owing to weakness and worthlessness) he had been unable to step over".⁴²

The resurrection proposed for Raskolnikov here by the narrator harmonises with the significance of physical release from jail in *The House of the Dead*, "Freedom, a new life, resurrection from the dead ... what a glorious moment!".⁴³ In this harmony, the moral imprisonment of Raskolnikov's solipsistic pride registers quite separately from his physical imprisonment, and his own resurrection from the dead occurs, in spite of his continued physical incarceration, through his acceptance of his guilt and accountability. At the same time, the isolating commitment to ideological transcendence is exorcised, allowing this surrender to external accountability to suggest inspiration or enlightenment rather than a weak lapse from the rigours of individualism. "To confess one's guilt and one's original sin is little, very little; one must wean oneself away from them completely. And that takes more than a little time".⁴⁴

Svidrigailov taunts Raskolnikov that his unhappy conscience belies his claim to the originality of genius and any connection to a "higher" moral category; he has reacted like "a citizen and a human being", in which case he "shouldn't have butted into this".⁴⁵ Svidrigailov castigates Raskolnikov for arrogantly stumbling in over his head; if he cannot stomach tales of debauchery and exploitation he has no right to the pride he still holds in his theoretically compelled transgression.

Long after his guilt has been pragmatically and legally established, Raskolnikov maintains the notion that the amoral freedom of men of genius is a fact, but one that simply does not apply to him. Raskolnikov's fidelity to his idea of this higher category reflects his inability to accept ordinary life as the sphere of a worthy existence. The manner of Svidrigailov's taunts seems to be in accordance with this notion, implying condescension and disdain for Raskolnikov's vanity and deluded ambition. But within the novel the credibility of this ambition and the hierarchy which it presumes is dubious. Svidrigailov is no more free than Raskolnikov: after the brief prospect of discovering in Raskolnikov a comrade who could understand and share the thrill of travestying moral guidelines in criminal debauchery, Svidrigailov's self-absolving isolation is too inhuman a place to return to. At the same time, the crippling of Raskolnikov's abstract self-justifications releases him to return, sullenly, to a condition of citizenship and

⁴² *Crime and Punishment*, 545.

⁴³ Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*, 357.

⁴⁴ *The House of the Dead*, 243.

⁴⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 485.

humanity. Porfiry Petrovich confronts Raskolnikov with a hypothetical criminal whose behaviour after a crime mirrors his own: "He lied incomparably, but he failed to reckon on his nature".⁴⁶ Porfiry allusively stresses that he is talking about a very *particular* case; in the moments when Raskolnikov's "nature" betrays him Dostoevsky points, though, to a general condition (something like a moral appetite) which these betrayals reveal.

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The urge to 'step over' is often founded in want, and in the ambivalence of reality to the standard, whether abstract or material, by which individuals esteem themselves and seek to be esteemed.⁴⁷ In financial power, though, a common language suggests itself in which individuals' desire to see their self-image externally approved, and their thwarted self-esteem, can attain the widespread approval which abstract terms cannot earn them. In *The Idiot* and *An Accidental Family* those who will step over the obstacles of their financial and social obscurity (Ganya Ivolgin and Arkady Dolgoruky, for instance) plan to do so with the authority of hard cash. Ganya's friend Ptitsyn has done just that, and it is implied also that Totsky's absorption of Filipp Barashkov's three daughters and his eventual exploitation of Nastasya Filippovna are absolved in practical terms as the privilege of a property owning gentleman. Raskolnikov's moral transgression is of course partly founded on notions of a similar financial self-propulsion.⁴⁸ In the

⁴⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 342.

⁴⁷ In *The Idiot*, Radomsky foretells a criminal career for Ippolit Terentyev: "I tell you again, crime is too common a recourse for these talentless, greedy, impatient nobodies" (*The Idiot*, 444). The nihilistic denial of moral bounds, he implies, merely facilitates the free-hand to act on feelings of personal entitlement without having to admit to any responsibility for, or guilt in offending, the rights of others, and precedes all manner of criminal negligence.

⁴⁸ Dostoevsky took some inspiration for Raskolnikov's character, and the problems of utilitarian transgression and blinkered ambition which he faces, from Pushkin's story "The Queen of Spades" (1833) (*The Complete Prose Tales of Alexandr Sergeyevitch Pushkin*, trans. Gillon R. Aitken (London: Vintage, 1993), 273-305). Hermann, the story's hero, "is a truly romantic figure; he has the profile of a Napoleon, and the soul of a Mephistopheles" (295). Which is to say he has the pride, ruthlessness and commitment to his ambitions of a military leader meticulously superintending a campaign, and the moral disorientation engendered by a goal that transcends his merely probable reality. "The game fascinates me," said Hermann, "but I am not in a position to sacrifice the essentials of life in the hope of acquiring the luxuries" (276). Hermann's refusal to gamble is entirely pragmatic. However, when he believes the element of risk has been removed by the old lady's advice (play on three, seven, ace), Hermann invests his inheritance and, therefore, his future. Like Raskolnikov's, Hermann's fall comes about not through foolishness or rash spontaneities, rather, it is the blinkered commitment of a highly serious devotion to future success. The reversal of his fortunes on the play of the third card comes as a complete surprise to Hermann, he had not for one moment considered that his ambition would not be realised.

... instead of an ace, before him lay the queen of spades. He could not believe his eyes, could not understand how he could have slipped up.

At that moment it seemed to him that the queen of spades winked at him and smiled. He was struck by an unusual likeness...

company of Ganya, Ptitsyn and Arkady, whose programs, though fuelled by spite and offended vanity, are fundamentally ethical, Raskolnikov's rationale seems more plainly grotesque and insidious than in isolation.

This distinction can perhaps be made clearer in relation to Joseph Frank's suggestion that "Raskolnikov had not been able to "step over" because he had still clung to moral conscience".⁴⁹ To say Raskolnikov "still clung" to what we recognise as moral convention deprives his final repentance of its affirmative impact. Raskolnikov does not fail to step over, never quite making good his getaway from moral boundaries, but rather arrives outside these limits and finds an inhospitable void. Initially, Raskolnikov tells himself it is not a void, and also that his discomfort merely proves him inadequate to the terms of his idea.⁵⁰ His final surrender, though, is far more corrosive of the fundamental credence he gives to the idea of the world-historical or absolute sphere. Raskolnikov steps over the manifest boundaries of moral convention and discovers a latent boundary of humanity which one cannot *choose* to escape. "You can't overleap nature by logic alone!" suggests Razumikhin.⁵¹ The utopian rationalism of Fourierist Phalansteries, against which Razumikhin is reacting here, is founded on the same over-abstracted rationalism as Raskolnikov's "not a crime". Raskolnikov's eventual return to the confines of conventional morality is attributable to his incompatibility to the environment 'beyond good and evil'. He does not cling to morality, but finds himself feeling deprived without it. His crime places him outside conventional patterns of moral support and he pines for the assurances and guidance they provide.

Svidrigailov's suicide, as much as Raskolnikov's eventual repentance, reflects Dostoevsky's commitment to demonstrating that abstract moral impulses exist as an

"The old woman!" he shouted in terror.

(305).

Hermann walks away from the tables financially ruined and personally annihilated. In the madness that he sinks into he is haunted by the two sequences that divide his desired and his actual fate, "he answers no questions, but merely mutters repeatedly: "Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, queen!" (305). The moment of sudden betrayal and the catastrophic irony of Hermann's rational self-interest and foolish gullibility seems present as an immanent possibility throughout Raskolnikov's avoidance of his crime. Raskolnikov's attempts to avoid the mortifying recognition of his own rejected impertinence are brought to a symbolic peak in a dream which resembles Hermann's final encounter with the old woman, winking from the card.

⁴⁹ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-71*, 131.

⁵⁰ Raskolnikov has stepped over in the same way that, with a conviction that he could walk on water, he might have stepped out of a boat and begun to move his arms and legs as if he were on solid ground. For as long as he continues to believe he is in fact walking on water he will sink, but when he accepts that he requires solid ground to walk on he will be able to start swimming instead, perhaps back to the boat, and at least to accept that walking is not possible on water. One might say that Raskolnikov is not able to accept the necessity, in keeping with this analogy, of swimming rather than walking in water, and though he never relinquishes his essential conviction in the propriety of solid ground, he does nevertheless step off the boat.

⁵¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 256.

inherent quality of human-ness. As such, this connection (between morality and human-ness) is nevertheless vulnerable to suspicions of having merely a nominal relevance. Svidrigailov, we might say, becomes human through his suicide but prior to his appearance in the novel has led an existence outside or beyond the conditions of humanity. The potential to re-enter humanity, though, reflects an affirmation that the “inhuman” existence had been a miscalculation, an error; the capacity to redress it implies an acceptance that present moral engagement involves accountability for the past.

In *The House of the Dead*, Orlov – for Dostoevsky, a quintessentially amoral criminal – scorns the narrator’s inquiries after his conscience; the narrator feels himself accused of a kind of inexperienced moral provincialism: “in his eyes I had suddenly become a silly little boy to whom it was impossible to talk as one would to an adult”.⁵² Orlov’s obliviousness to moral equivocations is further conveyed through his implacable isolation: existing outside the barriers of morality, Orlov has no urge to justify himself and nothing to say to those who ask him about a quality he cannot recognise within himself. Consequently, isolation such as Orlov’s is intractable. The complete moral schism reflected in the pathological (rather than flawed or reactionary) criminal renders him irrelevant to the bonds of human moral agreement. Orlov exists as an external challenge to the application of human moral judgements but not as a coherent challenge to the level at which these are generated.

Like the tyrant, the moral illiterate does not participate as human being or citizen in the moral agreements of the community with which they cohabit. Such figures are rare in Dostoevsky’s moral equations: he is more concerned with the latent moral principle which influences the ordinary criminals’ typical awareness that they have transgressed against something real.

Raskolnikov’s and Svidrigailov’s last meeting juxtaposes their parallel responses to their mutual failure to elicit from each other a word that will make them bearable to themselves. Svidrigailov’s suicide, contextualised by his dream of his victims, suggests an act of approval for the moral values which he has revelled in transgressing, while simultaneously acknowledging his irredeemable separation. Svidrigailov’s suicide is associated with none of the implications of protest or self-affirmation such as those which, in *Demons*, surround Kirillov’s abrogation of God’s power over life and death, but seems rather an acknowledgment of the impossibility both of rehabilitation and of unchanged continuation. It is in keeping with Nastasya Filippovna’s self-destructive

⁵² Dostoevsky, *The House of the Dead*, 83.

submission to the inevitability of Rogozhin's knife. Both Nastasya and Svidrigailov seem literally to destroy themselves in intuitive acts of self-restraint and deference to virtues which their existence could only continue to offend. In the prelude to their deaths both Nastasya and Svidrigailov waver between gratuitous predatory self-indulgence and reverence for human qualities from which they feel entirely alienated. Svidrigailov attempts to blackmail Raskolnikov's sister Dunya with his knowledge of the crime. Svidrigailov seems drawn to Dunya, his former employee and unattainable object of desire, as a potential saviour (inspired, perhaps, by Raskolnikov's optimism for the prospect of a redemptive new beginning with Sonya). Svidrigailov lures Dunya to him and seeks to trade Raskolnikov's continued freedom for her affection. He has her in his power, the door is locked and he is armed, but suddenly she is spared, he hands Dunya the pistol and invites her to shoot him. Dunya hesitates and Svidrigailov orders her to leave before his uncharacteristic refusal to domineer fades.

Svidrigailov turns once more to Raskolnikov, as to a potential peer, to declare himself and, he hopes, in Raskolnikov's sympathy to re-establish the support of community (again, as Raskolnikov had tried to do with Sonya, considering her a fallen being like himself). The failure of Svidrigailov's attempt not only reveals his own irrevocable solitude but jars Raskolnikov back into complicity with the moral conventions he has felt himself alien to.

After parting from Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov prefaces his grand gesture of self-annihilation with a more modest show of his capacity to discriminate good from bad. In an act of apparent penance Svidrigailov leaves his money to Sonya, recommending that it be managed by Razumikhin. Svidrigailov singles out Razumikhin, with his equally critical and heartfelt acceptance of the world, to administer a material bequest to the humble and self-sacrificing Sonya.

Svidrigailov seems to have chosen death with his last remnants of indignation, shame and despair. He avoids what seems an imminent fall into the complete moral atrophy and alienation which Stavrogin, in *Demons*, appears to be suffering. Svidrigailov has an appetite for sin, he luxuriates in the vileness of his self-indulgences, but remains vulnerable to the chastening recognition of his loneliness; Stavrogin is incapable of even this perverse kind of moral impulse. Stavrogin's suicide, though ostensibly brought about by a final spasm of moral self-disgust similar to Svidrigailov's, seems still to contain a significant element of pardon; of simply letting himself off the hook. Before Stavrogin hangs himself, he writes, "I know I ought to kill myself, to sweep myself off the earth like a vile insect; but I'm afraid of suicide, because I'm

afraid of showing magnanimity”; evidently he conquers this fear and acts on a moral self-revulsion that has emerged from latency.⁵³ Whether he had overcome it or not, Svidrigailov’s ‘fear’ betrays his continuing fixation with the terms of conventional morality: he will not commit suicide because it would be an act of confession, or contrition, and an acknowledgment of his failure to thrive outside moral boundaries; it would reaffirm the reality of the position he had tried to deny. He cannot help but evaluate the significance and success of his protests and dissatisfactions in their relationship to conventional morality and its habitual patterns of thought. In their separate ways, Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov are brought to this “magnanimous” point of surrender through their inability to sustain the emotional, as opposed to logical or abstract, credibility of the impunity their actions had presupposed in theory; Raskolnikov’s surrender parallels the moment of magnanimity in which Svidrigailov exterminates himself.

Raskolnikov’s ‘trial’ exposes him to an active moral force, while his coming to grips with this force reveals the nature of its influence, but his experiences (Sonya’s innocent fallen-ness, and Svidrigailov’s brazen immorality for example) show also that this presence is subject to subversion by individual and communal need. As Wellek (attempting to counter implications, encouraged by Bakhtin’s emphasis on the ‘polyphonic’ nature of Dostoevsky’s novels, that Dostoevsky advocates moral relativism) notes: “thou shalt not kill” is an edict which *Crime and Punishment* clearly endorses.⁵⁴ But it is attributed to the agency of the *dramatis personae* rather than to their observation of a received and accepted rule. Formed through the interaction of Dostoevsky’s scepticism, optimism and realism, morality in Dostoevsky’s works exists, regardless of his varyingly overt recommendations of divine authority, as a commitment (and addiction) to interaction; its particulars are plastic and subject to perpetual appraisal.

Dramatis Personae

- “*The living soul is suspicious, the living soul is retrograde!*”⁵⁵

Bakhtin’s idealising tendencies, implicit in his concept of dialogue (“All else is the means; dialogue is the end”⁵⁶), are particularly apparent in his conception of the

⁵³ Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994), 676.

⁵⁴ See: “Bakhtin’s View of Dostoevsky: ‘Polyphony’ and ‘Carnavalesque’”, *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, eds. R.L. Jackson & Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Center for International & Area Studies, 1985), 231-241.

relationship between Dostoevsky's characters and their guiding ideas or ideals. "All of Dostoevsky's major characters, as people of an idea, are absolutely unselfish, insofar as the idea has really taken control of the deepest recesses of their personality".⁵⁷ It is true, as Bakhtin observes, that Dostoevsky's characters are often identified primarily in "the image of an idea".⁵⁸ This identification suggests either a common posture of necessary devotion or the particular path of a traceable individual preference. Either way, it is the individual character not the idea which is the point of origin (the appetite for subjection or self-aggrandisement), and the apparent selflessness of their extreme devotion is in fact a superficial reflection of a human compulsion towards sustaining certainties. What Bakhtin defines as unselfish devotion would require the idea to be significant for its own sake, as a focus of personal absolute faith. He also observes, though, that "were one to think away the idea in which they live, their image would be totally destroyed".⁵⁹ The ideas of the individualists who appear in Dostoevsky's later work, though, are typically given preference over wider worldly facts as the rightful entitlements of rational individualism; it is primarily in the earlier works that the idea exists as a life-giving ideal for its own sake. Bakhtin's assertion that the 'thinking away' of the self's idea leads to the total destruction of the self's image is credible in relation to Dostoevsky's early half-gothic extremism, but much less so in the sophisticated psychological ambiguity of the later novels.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 256.

⁵⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 252.

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 87.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 87.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 87.

⁶⁰ In *Netochka Nezvanova*, Dostoevsky's unfinished first attempt at the novel form (curtailed by his arrest in 1849), the gothic romanticism of Hoffmann (1776-1822) is to the fore in the telling of a tale of egotistic delusions of grandeur. Dostoevsky's exposition of the violinist Efimov's dependence on the fixed idea of his musical genius, and his complete collapse after this idea is irrevocably disrupted, provides a clear affirmation of Bakhtin's claims. "[Efimov] died when his last hope had vanished, when in one instant everything with which he had deluded himself and which had sustained his entire existence disintegrated before his eyes" (*Netochka Nezvanova*, trans. Jane Kentish (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 68). This eventuality had been predicted by Efimov's former friend, the responsible and disciplined B.: "Prove to him that he's not a musical genius and I assure you he'd die on the spot, thunderstruck. It must be terrible to part with a fixed idea to which one's whole life has been dedicated, and which rests on genuine foundations, for he had a true vocation at first" (51-52). B. is uncertain, however, that any actual proof of this fact could register with Efimov, believing that "his madness is stronger than the truth and he'll quickly invent some counter-argument" (52). Similar situations in Dostoevsky's later writing suggest, however, a far more subtle relationship between the self and its "idea" and images. Even Myshkin, the idiot, who appears to go out with the extinguishing of his ideal is not straightforwardly devoted to it: as well as reflecting his incompatibility to a world which is ambivalent to human ideals, Myshkin's disintegration is brought about by the collapse of the individual support and consolation he personally depended on the *feasibility* of his ideal to provide in its actual absence. Though his infatuation is not overtly self-interested it is, nevertheless, dependent not merely devoted.

The flexibility of monologic habits, which evades such ‘thinking away’, attests to the dimension in which this devotion to an idea is most significant: not in the absolute legitimacy of the idea but in providing stability and credibility to the self image that has formed around it. The particular ideas that are sustained in this fashion (rather than being cast off the moment their ideal credentials become questionable) merely close a devotional circuit of the individual’s self affirmation and are invested with the gratification it facilitates: unto itself the particular idea remains unremarkable, one of many. In “A Lie is Saved By A Lie”, Dostoevsky suggests that when an individual comes to cherish “a certain dream, an idea, a theory, a conviction” as truth, the discovery of its fallibilities will be deflected by lies.⁶¹ Therein, individuals’ relationships with their personalised ideals are protected, and their guiding ideas’ limitations as abstract authorities are obscured by compromise.

Bakhtin suggests that all the alternatives to Raskolnikov’s “solution” of his uncertainty are entertained by him in an inner speech which reflects his latent interaction with the polyphonic scene.⁶² While the positions implicitly proposed by the other characters are absorbed by Raskolnikov, as Bakhtin implies, as contentions to be dulled, his own stance seems rather to reflect his persisting commitment to deflecting challenges, implicit in alternative perspectives, to a particular “truth” that he desires to believe in. In the novel, though, we see an external body claiming Raskolnikov as one of many, rather than Raskolnikov acknowledging the legitimate multi-facetedness of his own true self. Rather than suggesting what *Raskolnikov* might have done, the alternative moral positions suggest what *others*, characters who are not Raskolnikov, might have done in similar circumstances. Raskolnikov’s need to silence these alternatives does not necessarily reflect the multiplicity contained within him, it might simply reflect his capacity to acknowledge the credibility of other responses, or, more particularly, his

In “The Meek Girl”, a similar sustaining delusion is unravelled by the pawnbroker: the sudden overload and mental collapse which does for Efimov is replaced by an ambiguous process of revelation which seems to knit a new image from the frayed refuse of the old. The potency of this relationship is to be discovered in the actual formation of the idea and in the individual’s responsibility for its status, rather than in the idea itself. The narrowness, or purity, of Efimov’s self-delusion is incapable of change; the value he places on his self is indelibly imprinted in the image of artistic genius. It is not idealism as such, around which his pride formulates his self-image, but a highly particular prejudice in which musical genius is fixed upon as the greatest happiness and a most estimable human virtue. The pawnbroker in *The Meek Girl* is unhindered by such genuinely abstract values. Efimov’s dependence on his ideal places him in a situation where, in its absence, he must accept humiliation or insensibility: that he will not humble himself suggests the presence of a naively romantic vanity which gives way, in the monologues of secular individualism, to far more flexible rationales.

⁶¹ Dostoevsky, “A Lie is Saved By A Lie”, *A Writer’s Diary – Volume II, 1877-1881*, 1127-31, 1130.

increasing uncertainty of his capacity to establish the moral impunity which he had pre-emptively presumed for himself to expedite the crime. This acknowledgment suggests a challenge as potent to the nature of Raskolnikov's individual authority, as acknowledging the internal polyphony which, suggests Bakhtin, forms the latent profile of every individual consciousness. The former, though, acknowledges also that moral agreement among a population of decentred authorities does not depend on a population acknowledging their essential similarity (where all people contain all possibilities of action and justification behind the actions and justifications they actually manifest) but rather on acknowledging a capacity to decipher the implications of their differences and recognise the intersections which nevertheless bind them.

Though Raskolnikov is aware of the rational credibility of numerous alternative explanations of his situation, initially none has an exclusively compelling emotive purchase. He recognises and understands the implications of this range of potentially condemnatory possibilities, but feels them to be unsuitable, wrong or inferior to his own "solution" (this aspect of being better than others, which requires his awareness of existing in the midst of other *inadequate* responses, is fundamental to the demonstration of his innate superiority which Raskolnikov hopes his rebellion will make). It is only his pride and the theories required to safeguard it that inspire him to act as if out of certain abstract conviction. The combat he thrives on is the attempt not to be absorbed by the ambiguities which his initial paralysis of uncertainty (before he thought it all out in his room⁶³) had registered. Raskolnikov fights his incipient moral revulsion with himself in order to maintain a favoured explanation of his motivations, and he only begins to acknowledge the limitations of the explanation he had desired and chosen when his emotional affinities, and the priorities of his self-image, begin to align with values which, through his problematic but compelling need for interaction with other people, his own unwitting approval ratifies as a functional moral frame. Rather than failing to smash what needed smashing, or failing to step over convention, Raskolnikov has done as radical edicts of the period recommend and, suggests Dostoevsky, in the moral directives that crystallise around his desire for interaction and understanding, he

⁶² This is a recurring theme throughout Bakhtin's discussion of Raskolnikov's confusion, and also the interactions between numerous other characters in other novels (see particularly *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 238-39).

⁶³ Having solved the problem of his uncertainty and dissatisfaction in complete isolation Raskolnikov, in essence, only comes out of "his room" when admitting his sin, all the rest is an attempt to maintain the integrity of the solipsistic illumination that had come to him in his darkness. He attempts to superintend his interactions with the external world as if it was all still an abstract manifestation of his theoretical solution argued out in solipsistic isolation. Finally, though, he consents to acknowledge the merely self-perpetuated and isolated credibility of his "theory" and emerges into a clear-sighted and tempered orthodoxy.

has revealed and reinstated a genuine and vital convention. This recognition comes about through the intolerable vacuousness demanded of him by his initial position as a moral outcast; the theory he had expected to sustain him isn't first disproved and then logically abandoned, but rather the position it requires him to maintain becomes uninhabitable, thereby forcing Raskolnikov to face the unreality of the justifications for his crime.

The intoxication by ideas under which Raskolnikov suffers is a perpetual possibility in the worlds of Dostoevsky's novels. A variety of convictions are allowed to float about but they always remain fundamentally separate from the individuals who seek to found metaphysical certainties on them; it is their very inadequacy which compels fanaticism. Hence Raskolnikov's repulsion by political notions which accord with his own when espoused by Luzhin incorporates the unwelcome recognition that his individual convictions and ideals are formed from ideas floating in the air; ideas, that is, which exist outside his relationship with them, and with which others also form "understandings" and relationships (even if it is as superficial and callous as Luzhin's adoption of these floating ideas as the accoutrements of a modern man of thought⁶⁴). Rather than thoroughly unique individual inspirations, Raskolnikov begins to recognise the rootedness of his ideals in his reactions to external and common problems of identity, expectation and reality.

In Dostoevsky's novels, it is one of the fundamental implications of the tension between idealism, reality, convention and community that there *is* a standard (intrinsic to fertile moral interaction and conventions, agreement and intimacy), which individualistic monologic behaviour transgresses. Dostoevsky's individualistic idealists acknowledge this reluctantly; it is an undeniable consequence of their recognition (shared with the reader) of the natural world's limited tolerance for absolute idealism, and of the corruptions inherent in the monologic behaviour which sustains it (such as the seductive capacity to sustain the false semblance of its own authority). Rather than affirming the preference of a particular alternative (such as dialogic openness), this realisation merely approves the irrelevance or impossibility of humanly created or intelligible 'systems'.⁶⁵ In this regard, the implied ideological wisdom of the characters,

⁶⁴ Raskolnikov dismisses Luzhin's enthusiastic endorsement of their generation's "useful new ideas" - "...many harmful prejudices have been eradicated and derided ... In short, we have cut ourselves off irrevocably from the past, and that in itself, I think, is already something, sir..." (148) - as the rote regurgitation of commonplaces, to recommend himself to his potential brother in law.

⁶⁵ God and dialogic openness, respectively, are Dostoevsky's and Bakhtin's answers to the questions proposed by the reality portrayed in Dostoevsky's fictional worlds. In place of Bakhtin's mutually aware and open dialogue, the finite reduction (implicit, for instance, in Clough's depiction of the unpregnant pause) of moral responsibility to communication and individual choice founded on the repudiation of

and of the novels they appear in, progresses in different rhythms: revelations of new truth, new clarity, or new words, which convince characters (such as the pawnbroker) that their previously deluded relationships with reality have given way to unmediated truth, take place in contexts which allow these 'revelations' to offer reflections on the general needs and uses which these alleged truths can be made to serve. The truth of God or faith remains a separate, wholly different proposition in Dostoevsky's criticism of secular authority; it is the saving grace, the only way to truly exist in the embrace of an absolute. Around all the contentious voices which flourish as a consequence of the decentred status of truth in Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin attempts to construct a system which reconciles their apparent hostilities and shows that they each serve and adhere to a single and common purpose. Dostoevsky, though, is concerned with the common processes through which people, with their suspicious and retrograde souls, come to terms, in their varied and irreconcilable ways, with the immediate implications of their metaphysical disorientation. He is concerned, that is, with a common habit that results in self-righteous separateness. Even those characters who appear to harmonise with the openness of the dialogic scene face in others the same problematic tendencies which they appear to have overcome in themselves. They are forced therefore to employ strategic means of making their 'openness' salient to others, or risk appearing alien or simply incomprehensible to those whom they would be open with. The complexity of Myshkin's selfless compassion, along with the erosion of the apparent credibility of its foundations and the desirability of its effect, exemplifies the many-sidedness of the problems provoked by the individual's quest for certainty without common conventions of authority. The extrapolation of Dostoevsky's criticisms of monologic habits to some kind of utopian affirmation, whether of dialogic openness or brotherhood, seems capricious. The greatest strength of these criticisms lies simply in their compelling condemnation of a perverse and inadequate but increasingly commonplace means of interacting with reality.

monologic individualism incorporates both the reality of Dostoevsky's portrayal of individual psychology and the dignifying acknowledgment of human and social limitations which typically inhibit individuals from developing 'open' and selfless relationships. The difficulties that exist in the equal communication of ideas and abstract orientations between 'unsupervised' individuals, are registered with an anguish and longing that reflect their unwillingness to relinquish the possibility of a renaissance under the authority of a new word or idea (whether it be the rights of the individual, natural supernaturalism, communism, Platonic Idealism, or some other ideological system). It is this unwillingness, though, that keeps absolutists from accepting the ambivalence of the natural world, and determines that the only satisfaction of their idealism lies in isolated fanaticism or reactionary dependence on essentially unsustainable patterns of devotion.

Rather than moving towards an awareness of their possession of a latent sympathy with the 'voice' of every other character (as Bakhtin suggests⁶⁶), Dostoevsky's 'heroes' move towards an awareness that other individuals' 'voices', and the alternative worldviews they express, are based in individualistic authorisations similar to their own. Often, though, they cannot or will not acknowledge this awareness, though, due to their desire or need to consider their own voice absolutely authoritative; the awareness is consciously refuted, rationales are introduced to prove its impossibility. Though it might be argued that a conscious denial of an acknowledged reality can only be cynical and never naïvely literal, the point is rather that these denials form a ritual which allows the individual, regardless of their essential beliefs or knowledge, to act as if aspects of reality that disrupt their visions of order and authority did not exist. The result is the irascible and distempered relationship with reality which is characteristic of the monologue: every unexpected or unexplained disruption to the self-determined terms of its authority contains a threat of the eruption of a background fraught with inadmissible dilemmas.

The psychological processes of Dostoevsky's characters - not their idea, *per se*, but their dynamic *interaction* with their idea, and the means by which they maintain the idea's authority and prestige - play a significant part in his depiction of the role and repercussions of secular absolutes. This internal interaction takes place as a fluid relationship with an unfinished and unstable foundation.⁶⁷ In the dependent nature of their interaction with ideas and systems of ideas, and the way in which this dependence distorts their worldview, Dostoevsky's characters reveal the insistent nature of their desire for meaning and the reactions of this desire to the challenges and ambiguities of external reality. The ideas which Dostoevsky's characters can readily be identified by are not resolved emblems, they are tentative and anxious. The novels do not proceed as feats of ideological ventriloquism in which the pros and cons of particular systems are debated (though the characters occasionally indulge in such activities), they characterise rather the underlying relationship that exists between individuals and their ideas in general. The implication is not one of qualitative distinction - for instance, "do the

⁶⁶ Throughout the chapter "Discourse in Dostoevsky" in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (particularly "Dialogue in Dostoevsky", section iv, 251-66), Bakhtin draws on examples of dialogue from a variety of Dostoevsky's major novels to suggest the accords and resonances that are often struck within characters by the ostensibly opposing statements, opinions or moral positions of their interlocutors.

⁶⁷ By contrast, Bakhtin stresses the role of the "ideas" of Dostoevsky's characters, and their interaction as a more removed act of experimentation based in the interactions of individuals who themselves embody abstract systems of thought or ideologies. For Bakhtin, Raskolnikov's "inner speech unfolds like a philosophical drama, where the *dramatis personae* are embodied points of view on life and on the world, realized in living situations" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 239).

Slavophiles make more sense than the utopian socialists?" or "does radical nihilism dispel morality?" - but rather makes a general point about the inadequacy of intellectual or emotionally proposed authorities as foundations of absolute authority. The tentative individuals who anxiously attest to the authority of a particular "idea" subsequently participate in the dramatisation of their isolation and unadmitted thirst.

The constant intrusions of incompatible others on the inner speech of Dostoevsky's characters is a pattern which, for Bakhtin, dominates and defines the nature of their interrelations.⁶⁸ This pattern, though, does not give further emphasis to the necessity of admitting the truth of a polyphonic relativism, but rather impresses how little of reality any "idea-system" can embrace; and how much, therefore, remains inadmissible, though tangibly present, to individuals who cling to these systems and promote their authority. But to acknowledge this multiplicity as implicating openness as truth (rather than just openness) would be akin, for Dostoevsky's characters, to accepting ambiguity as clarity. Ambiguity may be just that - a clear reflection of an ambivalent natural world⁶⁹ - but Dostoevsky's characters typically experience it as a daunting disorientation; the kind of arduous freedom which the Grand Inquisitor is confident that his flock would rather not be offered. Bakhtin's approval of the dialogic mode of interaction under-emphasises the genuine panic which prompts individuals to evade ambiguity through monologic self-assertion.

"The idea *lives* not in one person's isolated individual consciousness - if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live . . . only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*".⁷⁰ It would seem, though, that what we see in the novels is that the idea actually *dies* when it enters into this relationship, because the character's desire was not for self-expression, or an inquisitive interaction with reality (which could survive ambiguity and relativity) but for certainty, in the erosion of which the potency, not of "the idea", but of their particular idea, also fades. In Dostoevsky's works, "the idea" plays its narrative role in motivating characters' attempts to avoid the kind of open relationship to external reality which would disprove its authority and discredit their dependence on it. This dependence will not fade out in accord with the discrediting of the idea it pertains to, but would merely provoke feelings of moral destitution. The characters' concern,

⁶⁸ See the chapter "Discourse in Dostoevsky" in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, particularly "Dialogue in Dostoevsky" (section iv, 251-66).

⁶⁹ As in Clough's work, for instance, where ambiguity is simply the foundation on which finite moral choices must be made.

therefore, is not with truth foremost but with sustaining the credibility or certainty of their conviction. This certainty is maintained through solipsism and isolation which, in an introverted, self-deluding and self-solacing way, support the *masquerade* of a dialogue with reality. This differentiation has significant repercussions in guiding one's approach to the shape and legitimacy of characters' interaction with the ideologies that participate similarly as the *dramatis personae* of Dostoevsky's worlds.

The notion, then, that Dostoevsky's characters are typically represented by their "idea" perhaps only recognises the superficial signs of a much more complex and interesting relationship between the two. It is through the suitability of the *relationship* between people and their cherished ideas - how well they resolve individuals' uncertainties or the manifest suitability of the moral code they provide - that Dostoevsky explores the credibility of abstract moral allegiances and life-goals, where God is not present to cut the Gordian knot of their provenance and credibility. As ciphers externalising personal worldviews and subjective assurances (which these ideas frequently are), the drama extends beyond the mere dialogue between various particular systems to their general inadequacy to fully satisfy or express the breadth of an individual's overt and unacknowledged self-awareness. Their ideas hint at symbolic embodiments of the characters' individual personalities and general circumstances, but it is their ultimate incapacity to make good on these hints, and become something more than the mere intimation of order, truth or conviction, on which Dostoevsky focuses in his depiction of their role in his characters' attempts to feel certain. The possibility of an inherently fulfilling fusion of self and idea motivates conscious ideological alignments, but it is typically a mirage (telling, both for the desire with which these mirages are initially apprehended, and for the particulars they fixate on).

The New Trichinae

While in jail Raskolnikov dreams of the "new trichinae".⁷¹ Consisting of "spirits endowed with reason and will", its symptoms imply a rampantly individualistic

⁷⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 87-88.

⁷¹ The allegory of the new trichinae is revisited in *Demons* through Stepan Verkhovensky's biblical analogy of Russia overrun by exorcised spirits. In Stepan's interpretation of the biblical allegory, Russia is the man possessed, and the hordes of ideological demons massing over his body are evidence of a cathartic expulsion. Russia must suffer the demons' manifest presence, represented in the novel by Pyotr Verkhovensky's terrorist cell and the variety of sick souls that orbits around it, before it can be free of them, but by their very presence the possibility of further 'infection' is implicit. The allegory implicates a population riddled with infected bodies. In *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, Raskolnikov and

positivism, encouraging individuals to deify their rationalised self-interests, and serve them accordingly: “Never, never had people believed themselves so intelligent and unshakeable in the truth as did these infected ones. Never had they thought their judgements, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions and beliefs more unshakeable”.⁷² This allegorical cameo of the novel as a whole presents the image of Raskolnikov arguing from within the grip of this infection; his “unshakeable” convictions struggle furiously to assert themselves against a background of contrasting insights and interpretations.

For as long as Raskolnikov avoids his crime, the distance which persists between himself and the rest of the world encourages him to perceive the conventions governing his dealings with both his aggressors and allies as intrinsically absurd. Banal rituals and concerns jar with, but persistently disrupt, his abstract fretting over life and death; he perceives them as odd, out of place and insignificant, and yet they persist as indicators of real and organic moral impulses. Reunited with his mother and sister after three years, Raskolnikov begins to squabble with Dunya over which one of them has the greater right to sacrifice themselves for the good of the family. Initially, Raskolnikov rails against Dunya’s proposed marriage to Luzhin, before recollecting himself:

“Strange,” he said slowly, as if suddenly struck by a new thought, “why am I making such a fuss? Why all this outcry? Go and marry whomever you like!”

He spoke as if to himself, though he said it aloud, and looked at his sister for some time as if in bewilderment.⁷³

These moments of suspension between abstract and material involvement with the world show the strain of an individual struggling to assure the supremacy of a single conviction. The awkwardness of Raskolnikov’s suppression of instinctive acts of sympathy demonstrates, in Frank’s words, “the manner in which Raskolnikov’s ideas have been affecting his personality”.⁷⁴

As Raskolnikov, Arkady and Ippolit each spontaneously involve themselves unselfishly with others, Dostoevsky alludes to the fertility of instinctive impulse (towards charity in these cases), in order to denigrate their individualistic intellectually approved conduct. As with Kolya Krasotkin, a serious thirteen year-old in *The Brothers*

Myshkin appear in the midst of populations that contextualise their abstract ‘illness’, and simultaneously display the loss of cogent social values that seems to provide both characters with further justifications for their radical activism.

⁷² Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 547.

⁷³ *Crime and Punishment*, 233.

⁷⁴ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years 1865-71*, 108.

Karamazov, the strain of mustering “the proper casualness of manner”, necessary to stifle unexpected and awkward fellow-feelings and sympathy for others’ sufferings, causes ruptures in his front of coolly rational *sang-froid*.⁷⁵ To the affected sophistication and worldliness of the ideologically committed raw youth, such feelings are, at least by their logic, mere sentimental slop, and must be treated with appropriate disdain. Such spontaneous (and often ‘rationally’ repented) betrayals of ideological dictates emerge as set-pieces, recurring throughout Dostoevsky’s work, which enact the smothering of emotional impulses towards brotherhood, by conscious fidelity to rationally approved templates of individually idealised moral codes. Some deeper current of human socialisation seems to direct behaviour by a hidden rationale while the idiosyncratic ethics produced by intellectual rationale counter by asserting the reflexive privilege of their explicit and particular relevance to each individual they are concocted by. Raskolnikov’s “bewilderment” conveys a radically disruptive intimation of the idiosyncratic nature of his intellectual ideals. This bewilderment is curiously suggestive arriving at a stage most conducive to reinforcing a sense of the absurdity of Raskolnikov’s abstraction. Neither of these appellations, “artifice” and “absurdity”, discredits the finite and individual significance of the intellectual principles they embrace but in Raskolnikov’s situation his dawning awareness of the thoroughly particular origins of their credibility, rather than their general theoretical salience, short-circuits his desire for impunity.

In 1869, Sergei Nechaev, the leader of an alleged network of radical terrorist cells (which possibly did not extend beyond the five members of his own cell), arranged with his four comrades to murder a co-conspirator who had threatened to inform on the embryonic organisation. Nechaev himself escaped arrest, but the cell was discovered and his accomplices went to trial in 1871. Dostoevsky attended the trial and used the covert terrorist cell and their crime as a founding motif for *Demons*:

I wanted to pose the question and, as clearly as possible, provide an answer to it in the form of a novel: how is it possible in our changing and astonishing society of today to have not a Nechaev but *Nechaevs*, and how does it happen that these *Nechaevs* eventually acquire their own Nechaevists?.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1993), 623.

⁷⁶ Dostoevsky, “One of Today’s Falsehoods” (1873), *A Writer’s Diary – Volume I, 1873-1876*, 279-92, 279.

Dostoevsky's portrayal of the Nechaev-like figure, Pyotr Verkhovensky - he is cold, vicious and parasitic - reflects the characteristics which he had come to associate with ideologically grounded acts of violent dissent.

The affair brought to light an encoded revolutionary credo written by Nechaev and Mikhail Bakunin. Charles Moser observes:

The whole document is impregnated with an extravagant, other-worldly fanaticism. 'The revolutionary is a doomed man', reads the first paragraph. 'He has no interests of his own, no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single exclusive interest, by one thought, by one passion - the revolution'.⁷⁷

Nechaev's revolutionary agenda and orchestration of the mutually binding murder of a rogue peer provided Dostoevsky with the framework for *Demons*.

Turgenev's Dmitri Rudin, a superfluous man who drifts into revolutionary action as a despairing self-sacrifice (in *Rudin*), and the stunted personality of Maxim Gorky's revolutionary pawn, Yevsey Klimkov (protagonist of *The Life of a Useless Man*), are depictions of revolutionary activism which suggest that, rather than reflecting the vocation of a special class of moral rebels, it might simply be pursued as a prop to individuals' feelings of vulnerability, confusion and uselessness. These figures reflect a causal reversal, implicit in Nechaev's declaration of revolutionary passion, wherein "no affairs, no feelings, no attachments, no belongings, not even a name" become preconditions for revolutionary zeal, rather than necessary side effects of selfless commitment to a consuming abstract authority.⁷⁸ These activists have not weaned themselves from moral guides in deference to a higher order of truth, they clutch at causes to ease the discontents of a pre-existing moral void.

In "A Few Words About Young People" Dostoevsky wrote:

Ideas fly about through the air, but they certainly follow some laws; ideas live and are spread in accordance with laws too difficult for us to grasp; ideas are infectious, and do you know that within the general mood of life a certain idea, a certain concern or longing accessible only to a highly educated and developed mind, may suddenly be passed on to a creature who is semiliterate, coarse, and who has never

⁷⁷ Moser, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's*, 56.

⁷⁸ Similarly, in Andre Malraux's *Man's Estate*, the sacrifices of revolutionary commitment does not seem to be made *purely* (in devotion to a cause) but through a mixture of alienation and self-loathing, hostility to authority and a fascination with redeeming a futile existence through a self-aggrandising death.

been concerned about anything; and that such an idea may suddenly infect the person's soul with its influence?⁷⁹

It is clear again that the ideas of these characters are not predetermined expressions of individuality or even external inspirations that have become entrenched in this role: these ideas and characters exist effectively as two separate populations tentatively aligned in relationships which are, therefore, intrinsically circumstantial, arbitrary and dubious. The extreme commitment which this alignment can engender is a reflection of this fundamental but highly destructive collision between genuine uncertainty and the apparent necessity of conviction in the pursuit of worldly ambition. The new world envisaged by Goethe's *Faust* is selectively engineered so that conviction need not contest with uncertainty.

Naïvete is not innocent in Dostoevsky's works, but it is redeemable. Sorrow and frustration temper his anger and condemnation of its consequences. But his sorrow is not merely the parent's didactically intended disappointment in a child's indiscretions, it encompasses the "children" as victims also of their inexperience and unworldly altruism. Thus Dostoevsky avoids appearing to stand in righteous judgement over the tendency of individuals' immature demands for certainty to lead them self-righteously towards antisocial extremism. Still, Dostoevsky's sympathy is for the individuals, never the ideas they sought to promote; that these ideas were embraced with genuine altruism (or, as Frank suggests, with "so much self-sacrificing dedication and moral

⁷⁹ Dostoevsky, "A Few Words About Young People", *A Writer's Diary - volume I, 1873-1876*, 738. An example of the different relationships a highly educated and a semiliterate mind can form with the same idea is, in the different reactions of the Ivan and Smerdyakov, and also Ivan and Dmitry to the hypothesis "All is permitted" at the heart of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky intimates that it is perhaps Smerdyakov's upstart appropriation of a seemingly credible argument which, essentially, he does not understand beyond its apparent approval of his destructive hatred. Smerdyakov lacks the intellectual heritage or foundations which give Ivan ballast (sometimes) in his abstract moral doubts and speculations, and cannot grasp, it is implied, the hypothetical or critical nature of Ivan's proposition (neither can Dmitry), who, like Smerdyakov, grasps only the surface, "All is permitted", feeling it to provide a general principle that solves a merely personal grievances. Dmitry is uneducated but too passionate, while Smerdyakov, Dostoevsky invites us to conclude, suffers from an extremely destructive manifestation of *ressentiment* and snobbish imitation: he claims the privilege of moral impunity as if it were a measure of class, a rank, but in his application shows the intrinsic naïvete, or bad tone, of the arriviste. Fyodor Pavlovich tauntingly calls him Balaam's ass: his casuistic logic and revolutionary free-thought, are, Fyodor implies, the language of a race or class from which, by birth and conformation, he is excluded; an ass might even seem to speak sense, but the mere fact of its doing so will even then seem ridiculous. Ivan looks upon Smerdyakov with similar disdain, deeming him the cannon fodder of an imminent social revolution. Such explicit expressions of scorn for the intellectual pretensions of the lower middle classes are not uncommon in Dostoevsky's later novels, and often these explicit expressions seem to be affirmed by the works as a whole, they are implicitly ratified in the consequences Dostoevsky plots for malcontents like Smerdyakov (in *Demons* and *An Accidental Family* similar figures, though more incidental to the main plots, are numerous). Among other things, it reflects Dostoevsky's suspicion of increasing disruptions to social degree which was resulting from an apparent loosening, in the 1860s, of Tsarist autocracy, a spread of literacy and the growth of a semi-educated middle-class clerks to serve a growing

fervour”⁸⁰), neither mitigates the actions this dedication produced nor privileges the ideas that earned this fervour. It merely acknowledges that the compulsion of these figures to subordinate themselves to new certainties originates in an ambivalent need for assurance and order. It is because he takes this need as an intractable feature of human nature that Dostoevsky is unable to entertain the possibility that uncertainty might require neither reactionary affirmations of faith nor the dubious inflation of secular ideals to standards of absolute authority. For Dostoevsky, sceptical dissolution of certainty leads to the spiteful dissatisfaction of the Underground Man, who can neither support the idea of faith nor tolerate or approve the ambiguity that exists without it. The recognition of a healthy finite mode of moral discourse is unthinkable for Dostoevsky: the secular world is treacherously ambiguous, and uncertainty is an intolerable burden; Dostoevsky’s only recourse is divine faith.

In attributing Raskolnikov’s crime to ‘intoxication’ with ideas, with Dostoevsky as anguished overseer,⁸¹ Frank approvingly notes Phillip Rahv’s emphasis, in “Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, on the influence of Hegel’s world-historical individual over Dostoevsky’s characterisation of Raskolnikov. Rahv writes: “It is in Hegel rather [than Nietzsche] that we discover a direct and obvious source of Raskolnikov’s notion of inferior and superior men, the superior ones having the right to commit breaches of morality while the inferiors are obliged to mind their business”.⁸² By having Raskolnikov attempt to declare himself superior by performing a conventionally immoral act, Dostoevsky entangles him in “what is in truth a comedy of mistaken identity: an obvious victim of the historical process – a small man in search of personal security and happiness laughably taking himself for its hero. In this sense he is no better than a clown, and he does indeed laugh at himself from time to time”.⁸³ In direct sympathy with Raskolnikov’s own attempt to salvage the theory behind “stepping

bureaucracy, and the influence of the west, particularly individualism, which encouraged all individuals to consider themselves inherently worthy (at least hypothetically) of any place or role in society.

⁸⁰ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871*, 54.

⁸¹ Frank makes much of this intoxication, it prepares the way for the mitigatory plea he makes on behalf of Raskolnikov’s diminished responsibility. But this is to ignore that Raskolnikov is not intoxicated by just any ideas, the theories that bewitch him all nurture flatter or support a perspective of reality which Raskolnikov’s pride and self-esteem deem preferable to merely ambivalent reality. His intoxication, then, is itself a culpable indulgence, a weakness to begin with which engenders his indifference to aspects of a reality he has drunkenly decided is inadequate. In his challenge to Bakhtin’s characterisation of Dostoevsky’s technique as polyphonic, “Bakhtin’s View of Dostoevsky: ‘Polyphony’ and ‘Carnavalesque’”, René Wellek includes a similar perspective of Raskolnikov’s moral confusion as a dimension of the novel’s clear moral purpose.

⁸² Phillip Rahv, “Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. René Wellek (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 16-38, 34.

⁸³ Rahv, “Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, 34.

over”, Rahv attributes the particular failure of his attempt to prove himself worthy of his theory as a merely particular rebuttal: Raskolnikov is simply not the man he thought he was.⁸⁴ It is the world around Raskolnikov, however, that is the source of his failure and its implications are unilateral. Raskolnikov’s trial is ultimately not a personal test of his ability to go beyond moral confines but a component of Dostoevsky’s general argument against the existence of such a position. The mistaken identity is not simply Raskolnikov’s: the black comedy of his attempt to be someone else is not based on the comical high hopes of an inferior ordinary being, it is based on a false reification of the abstract expressions of finite reality. The world historic individuals and bronze statues have not happened upon a higher code. Rather, they have been adopted as the symbols of extreme change which they pre-empt (and, for many, embody) but do not form.

Recounting the exemplary virtues of his authority, Raskolnikov explains that

“if indeed there was no other path for him [Napoleon], he’d up and throttle her before she could make a peep, without even a moment’s thoughtfulness! ... So I, too ... came out of my thoughtfulness ... I throttled her ... following the example of my authority ... And that’s exactly how it was! You think it’s funny? Yes, Sonya, the funniest thing is that maybe that’s precisely how it was... [.]”⁸⁵

Raskolnikov’s satanic pride - the mark of Byronic heroism and the romantic *sehnsücht* of Schillerism⁸⁶ - is a common trope of the antinihilist depictions of radical idealists

⁸⁴ Agreeing with Porfiry Petrovitch’s suggestion that Raskolnikov would withstand any torture as long as it were for “faith or God”, Rahv concludes that Raskolnikov’s inability to maintain his revolutionary program reflects merely a mistaken initial platform of revolt and subsequently an aversion to and inadequacy for the ordeals it necessitates. “That Raskolnikov stands in an inauthentic relation to his crime is thus confirmed by the author’s spokesman in the novel. The crime does not truly belong to him, and that is the reason he affects us as being almost ludicrously inadequate to his deed” (“Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, 35). It would seem rather that the crime really does belong to Raskolnikov and that his discovery here is the absurdity of the framework necessary to the conviction that his murders are “not a crime” (*Crime and Punishment*, 71). The attempted negation of the ‘criminal’ aspect of the murder is important to Raskolnikov as a means of deflecting the implications this attribution holds in relation to the version of his own character which it validates (rebel idealist, rather than criminal).

Rahv sees *Crime and Punishment* as defending the “right to violent rebellion” (“Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, 37). Dostoevsky, though, shows no intention of defending any of his rebellious characters from the consequences of their rebellions, allowing these consequences to overburden, distort and, typically, to dissolve the abstract or ideological commitments which had prompted their breach with moral conventions.

Rahv writes “what better way was there of dramatising the struggle within him between guilt and scornful pride than by showing him entering almost in spite of himself into relations with people who for reasons both good and bad are intent on penetrating his isolation?” (25-26). Rahv implies that only in isolation could Raskolnikov maintain the idea that he in particular could survive outside the boundaries of morality. But Dostoevsky seems intent on demonstrating the general failure of the ‘idea’ to materialise as actual support, rather than simply delineating the particularity of Raskolnikov’s incapacity to fulfil the requirements of ideological stepping over.

⁸⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 415.

⁸⁶ Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* critically examines the authenticity and viability of such tropes, exposing particularly the empty vanity that isolates Eugene and smothers any internal life or personality.

which proliferated throughout Russian novels in the 1860s.⁸⁷ Raskolnikov's satanic pride does not mark him out as a special case, it identifies him with a crowd of individuals who, in their uncertainty, impressionability and irascible narcissism, are profoundly ordinary.⁸⁸

While world historical figures (Alexander, Lycurgus, Napoleon) and romanticised hero/villains, such as Schiller's Karl Moor, furnish Raskolnikov with estimable authorities (as they might have a young Dostoevsky), it is ultimately the unreality of these templates and the immorality of the roles they serve which the novel sets out to show. Raskolnikov's relationships with the moral presence of other characters in the novel, moulded and reinforced by the directives of his 'theory', prompt and focus Dostoevsky's simultaneously pedagogical strictness and paternal indulgence.

The bleakly comic absurdity of his actions is an implication which Raskolnikov, with his proud aversion to acknowledging his shame and foolishness, strains to silence. Raskolnikov is the butt of a joke, a black comedy; the concrete ramifications of the crime he conceives as an abstraction, though, are far too serious for his story to proceed as a lampooning of his theory of a carefree revolt against convention. After the sleepwalking unreality which expedites his experiment, the manifest frailty and unsettledness of Raskolnikov's rationalisations accentuates the essential meanness of his purportedly unimpeachable motivations. Dogged by both the image of the reality he hoped to forge and the image of the reality he *has* forged, it is precisely the underlying but insistent ridicule, warranted (certainly in his own eyes) by his theoretically justified but pragmatically indefensible action, which he seeks to defray in defending himself from the claims of actual or moral accountability.

Raskolnikov becomes a willing puppet of the justifications which are necessitated by his attempts to exonerate his selfishness; his ideas, plans and actions are directed by his need to fit them into particular arguments on which he hopes to rest. An individual capable of acting outside the common conventions of right and wrong would not, for instance, feel personal guilt for any transgression they deem necessary to an approved end. Raskolnikov feels the strain of this discrepancy, the postures he is required to

⁸⁷ In *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's*, Charles Moser devotes a chapter to the characteristic aspects of antinihilist portrayals of the contemporary radical. Of their egotism Moser writes, "This theme runs 'like a red thread' through all the antinihilist novels. Some nihilists are thorough scoundrels, others are blindly following the leader, but all, except a few like Reiner, have a most excellent opinion of their own achievements" (153).

⁸⁸ It is with similar wilfulness and pride, for example, that Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio steps over the voice of conventional wisdom (which seeks to remind him, among other things, that he has a wooden head) by squashing the Talking Cricket.

adopt seem inadequate and unequitable to him, but his theories deem them right and necessary to the kind of being he desires to be (or seem to be). Raskolnikov *does* feel personal guilt but is unable to acknowledge it as such without conceding his ordinariness. The murder, intended as an act of freedom, of kicking loose from conventional moral limits, proceeds as an act which, in spite of his intellectual approval and identification with its purported goal, is never consecrated as a satisfactory personal expression of his character. This is fundamental to Dostoevsky's depiction of the relationship between "our little boys and girls" and the ideas which they commit themselves to. It is necessary also for Raskolnikov's eventual rehabilitation, and his realignment with one of the novel's greatest "goods", human belonging, that the evil of his crime be confined to ignorance and pride rather than focused malice or cruelty. In Manzoni's *The Betrothed* the unlikely repentance of a feared bandit lord, who has traded with evil on a grand scale, pays homage to the strength of the spirit to move even the most stubborn of sinners. This dubious trope of moral regeneration is paralleled by the implications Lebedev, in *The Idiot*, draws from the sudden and unprompted repentance and confession, after years of habitual killing, of a man who had survived a period of extreme famine by murdering and eating monks and children.⁸⁹ What compelling moral idea had suddenly possessed him? Lebedev wonders, alluding also to the impossibility of such a binding idea, "stronger than the stake, the fire, even the habit of more than twenty years", among the intrinsically separate and self-serving pseudo-moralities he attributes to the late nineteenth century.⁹⁰

While similar to these rituals of deference to a compelling external authority, the self-condemnations of Schiller's Karl Moor and Byron's Manfred simultaneously salutes the nobility of self-determination as well as the nobility of a spontaneous and free surrender to moral impulses. Each sentences himself for the crimes he acknowledges and each executes the sentence out of respect for the dignity of moral independence. The credibility of the repentance of Manzoni's bandit lord is assisted by the fact that the reader has never directly encountered his tyranny. It is reported, like Karl Moor's baby killing exploits, in the context of conveying the extraordinary phenomenon of their repentance. In contrast to the moral stage-managing of these grandiose gestures towards spiritual dignity and noble awakening, Raskolnikov's crime takes place, in detail, right before us. Dostoevsky describes firstly the blows to the old lady: Raskolnikov bends down to see her bulging eyes and convulsed face. As he

⁸⁹ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 396. Lebedev interprets the crime at length throughout Part 3, chapter 4.

⁹⁰ *The Idiot*, 399.

hurriedly prises open drawers, the pawnbroker's sister Lizaveta enters; Raskolnikov attacks and the narrator observes that "this wretched Lizaveta was so simple, so downtrodden, and so permanently frightened that she did not even raise a hand to protect her face".⁹¹ Raskolnikov's blow splits "the whole upper part of her forehead, almost to the crown".⁹² By sheer unhappy circumstance Raskolnikov has been forced to extend his strictly utilitarian trial to the pawnbroker's sister, and though we are informed that "[h]is own strength seemed to have no part in it" – as if he accepts his moral accountability for the "necessary" murder but not for the necessities that are consequent on it – when proffered as a kind of alibi this notion belies the intrinsic avoidance of fact which sustains his feeling that he represents a higher category of human.⁹³ Nevertheless, the atmosphere of fevered unreality ensures that should we later recall the image of Lizaveta's split skull, we will condemn the intoxication of pride and ignorance which claims Raskolnikov as one of its sleepwalking victims rather than merely its personified tool of destruction.⁹⁴

Unsuspected and Unexpected Feelings

Such is Raskolnikov's desire for certainty, suggests Porfiry Petrovich, he would smile under torture for the sake of a credible authority. The capacity of idealists for delayed gratification in the name of their "higher line" is potent, and reflected in this potency and willingness to suffer is the often distorting avidity with which they seek to validate their cause by "discovering" signs of its objective authority.

Reflecting on the theories his own generation had idealised, Dostoevsky noted: "[w]e were in a great hurry and did very little practical living, and we are ashamed of many of the most natural things because they do not fit into the theory".⁹⁵ Living

⁹¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 79.

⁹² *Crime and Punishment*, 79.

⁹³ *Crime and Punishment*, 76.

⁹⁴ In the actual course of events up to and including the crime, Raskolnikov feels moved by forces of circumstance or fate from point to point in a sequence that carries him towards and through the murder. Raskolnikov is most thoroughly identified not with any particular motive but rather with the underlying frustration and desire which determine that he cannot pass up these directives. Raskolnikov acts so that he might know one way or another and thereby quell the babble that torments his inactivity.

Rather than being a victim of his environment, though, Raskolnikov is a victim of his *response* to his environment, of which he is simultaneously the perpetrator. Both Sonya and Porfiry Petrovich judge Raskolnikov with an awareness of his unwitting fall into self-torment. Raskolnikov is the victim of the ignorance and pride of his answer to the moral chaos he perceives in contemporary culture. In his mother's death (implicitly of a broken heart) Raskolnikov's role as both the criminal expression and victim of rational individualism is profoundly apparent.

⁹⁵ Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky*, Volume II, 162.

information comes too indiscriminately; it is too subtle, too diffuse and disorderly to support absolute certainties; it offers neither a rule nor an answer, and fits into neither 'theory' nor the ideals theories often reify.

The confusion and indefiniteness of contemporary ideas comes about for the simplest reason: ... so far we have gathered *by far* too few facts to deduce any conclusions from them at all. And meanwhile we rush to make these conclusions, obeying our law of development. Only the most limited natures ... whatever they call themselves, can deduce absolute results // from the facts on hand today and *be content* with them. // ⁹⁶

"Our law of development", rushing towards conclusive certainties, is behind Raskolnikov's precipitate activism.

In his article on crime, Raskolnikov suggests that the Napoleons, Muhammads, and Lyncurguses are "those who have the gift or talent of speaking a *new word* in their environment".⁹⁷ The rest of the population "preserves the world and increases it", while the gifted body of "people proper", "moves the world and leads it forward".⁹⁸ Initially condemned as transgressors, these leaders are eventually placed on pedestals; they are the Bronze Statues Raskolnikov aspires to emulate.

"I should have known," he thought, with a bitter smile, "and how, knowing myself, *anticipating* myself, did I dare take an axe and bloody my hands! I had to have known beforehand . . . Eh! but I did know beforehand . . ." he whispered in despair.

At times he stopped still at some thought.

"No, those people are made differently; the true *master*, to whom all is permitted, sacks Toulon, makes a slaughterhouse of Paris, *forgets* an army in Egypt, *expends* half a million men in a Moscow campaign, and gets off with a pun at Vilno; and when he dies they set up monuments to him - and thus *everything* is permitted. No, obviously such men are made not of flesh but of bronze!"⁹⁹

The passage suggests that, rather than "testing" himself, Raskolnikov committed the crime out of an intense desire to avoid acknowledging, affirming or accepting what he recognised as limits on individual freedom.¹⁰⁰ Raskolnikov knew, but didn't want to acknowledge or acquiesce in such knowledge; he "knew" in a manner that held no

⁹⁶ *The Unpublished Dostoevsky*, Volume I, 41-42.

⁹⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 260.

⁹⁸ *Crime and Punishment*, 261.

⁹⁹ *Crime and Punishment*, 273-74.

¹⁰⁰ Even Raskolnikov's world-beating ambition to attain a Napoleonic stature turns out to be merely a common symptom encouraged by the social upheaval and spiritual confusion of the period. "Who in our Russia nowadays does not consider himself a Napoleon" (*Crime and Punishment*, 265), quips Porfiry Petrovich to Raskolnikov, teasing him with the banality of his egotism.

decisive weight against desires, uncertainties and alternative possibilities, one that had no equivocal weight. His moral perplexity left him directionless; his heart, "chafed by theories",¹⁰¹ is susceptible to the balm of false certainty and fanaticism.¹⁰²

Raskolnikov's neglect of the fact that men of bronze were flesh first and were made into icons by others, reflects his own fixation on the *status* of power and the veneration attributed to 'heroic' deeds. His preoccupation with Bronze Statues recalls Pushkin's "The Bronze Horseman" (as I have discussed previously), in which a statue of Peter the Great, embodying the unjust and unaccountable hierarchies on which man-made social and political orders tend to rely, exerts a ghostly, malevolent and inescapable power over Petersburg's urban poor. These hierarchies marginalise, with no avenue of recourse, the protagonist Eugene's interests and sufferings. Having lost everything that was dear to him in one of the Petersburg floods Eugene shakes his fist at the bronze statue of Peter the Great.¹⁰³ When he turns away to leave, he hears the sound

¹⁰¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 456.

¹⁰² In the second part of the passage above we have the distinction between iconic symbol as form and symbol as essence; that is: the great man as a statue and catalogue of feats, detached from any proportional notion of their source and isolated significance. Raskolnikov interprets this status as the manifestation of an internal quality which others merely recognise and record rather than generate in response to some need. To Raskolnikov's selective and hungry gaze, the statues of great men, their imagined moral mandate, their superiority - which is, as it were, the rhetorical or lyrical flourish which transposes their status from history to myth - is their entirety. These 'flourishes', though, are ratified by communities in relation to the success with which they embody a quality or qualities they cherish or desire. The bronze statues of heralded men exemplify the kind of misleading ready-made truths which Dostoevsky considered the 1860s radicals to be unavoidably drawn towards and dependent on. "At least it is perfectly clear that our younger generation are destined to seek out its ideals and the higher meaning of life for itself. But this isolation of our younger generation, this abandonment of them to their own devices is something dreadful Our young people have been so placed that they have absolutely nowhere to get advice about the higher meaning of life" ("A Few Words About Young People" (*A Writer's Diary - Volume I, 1873-1876*, 737-40), 738-39). In what they receive from their fathers, their families, and from tradition, they respect nothing; with their naïve impressionability and a single-minded desire for decisive guidelines, they are particularly susceptible to the tenuous assurances of unequivocal, unsubtle and often inadequate "higher" meanings.

¹⁰³ In Pushkin's tale, the oppressive omnipresent power of Tsarist authority exists in natural (and reprehensible) opposition to the desires and capacity of a recently urbanised populace to lay down roots and develop a mutually reaffirming relationship with their 'artificial' environment. The very foundations of urbanisation (responding to needs and forces that appeared so strange, so sudden and so unnatural to those for whom a more familiar and comprehensible world seemed to be fading out before their eyes) seem to thwart this desire by keeping its citizens in a vulnerable state of constant disorientation.

This enforced rootless-ness alludes to the 'artificial' city's discordance with organic or natural order. Petersburg was built on reclaimed marshland (like Faust's new world in Goethe's *Faust - Part II*) and was often depicted, particularly by Dostoevsky, as having come into being through theory and artifice, and existing on an intrinsically tenuous metaphysical foundation. The Petersburg floods, one of which washes away Eugene's home, and essentially his life, in *The Bronze Horseman*, suggest the visitation of a backlash which occurs as the natural forces which the artificial city exists in defiance of, demand a forfeit or take their tithe. These floods, in Pushkin's story, cyclically wash away the stable foundations which might have allowed for the development of fertile relationships between city and citizens; Eugene, like Dostoevsky's Underground Man and other tormented Petersburg *chinovniks*, is tormented by the impossibility of putting down roots or taking any part in the life of the city other than as faceless flotsam, suffering on behalf of the abstracted whims of its totalitarian rulers.

of hooves on the pavement. Eugene flees, but he is unable to escape the feeling of pursuit and persecution; he hears phantom footfalls throughout the city.

Raskolnikov's fixation on Bronze statues is a manifestation of an intrinsically destabilising dissatisfaction with his own normality, which finds expression in an envious desire for the power which he feels could redress his frustration. While Pushkin's Eugene curses the oppressive statue, a protest against the authoritarian state it embodies, Raskolnikov wants to *be* a 'statue' in order to escape from the indignity of his vulnerability.

Raskolnikov cannot properly distinguish the particular process and values that give his icons of power their lustre (either in general, or for him specifically). In order to circumvent the sometimes humiliating and debilitating confusions which partners development, Raskolnikov adopts the finished forms of others; prestigious others, because he loathes the possibility that his insignificance is fitting and intractable.

Razumikhin chastises Raskolnikov for being a foreign translation, stigmatising his demeanour and ideas as the product of European rationalism. Razumikhin is himself a translator, but while transplanted western thought possesses Raskolnikov and is esteemed by him as a gnostic privilege or higher truth, Razumikhin maintains a pragmatic awareness of the contingency and worldliness of the strange floating ideas (they are his bread and butter not his gospel/catechism). Razumikhin, "ardent, sincere, simple, honest",¹⁰⁴ appears blessed by Dostoevsky with the ballast and security of an implied "folk" goodness and critical engagement with the concrete reality of his motherland.

The majority of Dostoevsky's main characters exist in similar states of conflicted cultural heritage: there are Prince Myshkin (perhaps the most striking representative of an inorganic grafting of Western intellectual heritage onto Russian sensibilities), Nastasya Filippovna, Rogozhin, and Aglaya Yepanchin in *The Idiot*; Stavrogin, Pyotr and Stepan Verkhovensky in *Demons*; Smerdyakov, Dmitry and Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov*; and Prince Versilov, Arkady Dolgoruky and his adolescent friends in *An Accidental Family*. All these characters, and many others, are characterised by varying admixtures of characteristically Russian and Western qualities; their hybridity reflects the reality of Russian-ness for the educated and middle class since the Europeanism of Peter the Great. Dostoevsky portrays this state as the self-defeating fusion of Russian sincerity and selflessness with European intellect and

¹⁰⁴ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 205.

individualism. These might equally be associated with the innocence of childhood and the self-consciousness of maturity, or rural simplicity as opposed to urban disorientation. Dostoevsky's nationalistic overtone is a nominal preference; the collision Dostoevsky implies through it, particularly if one considers it with regard to stereotypes of rural and urban existence, is characteristic of individuals and groups facing the emergence of what appear alien and more complex ways of life.

In the cold reason which Raskolnikov flaunts in his article on crime, and in his immediate interest in an overheard discussion of utilitarian extermination (an idea in harmony with his own speculations), Dostoevsky marks Raskolnikov with some emblematic taints of "European" rationalism and of a tendency to treat subjective abstractions as independent aspects of reality (the symptoms of the "new trichinae" he dreams of in prison). Raskolnikov's concerns for the vulnerable drunken girl and for Marmeladov's family, though, exhibit superficially contradictory signs of heartfelt fellow-feeling which suggest the taint of rationalism is not "natural" to Raskolnikov, but an intellectual appropriation. At no point is Raskolnikov totally owned by the notion of the extraordinary man; his program of radical utilitarianism (kill a louse to live a worthy life) and his hopes of discovering in himself a man beyond moral categories are unresolved. The awareness of his transgression is blatant, but it is simultaneously suspended or deferred, in the name of possible impunity, exoneration or vindication which persist as the corollaries of his uncertainty as to why and of what he is, logically or rationally, guilty.¹⁰⁵

A similar trail of inconsistency between his ideas and the consequences they breed leads Raskolnikov to the unsettling recognition that as he had not killed for money (his initial reason to murder a rich louse), his real motives are uncertain, and his rationalisations implicitly dubious.

¹⁰⁵ Raskolnikov's combative jousts with his pursuers and accusers, reflected in his private councils and his attempts to make himself understood by those he judges likely to be sympathetic, are expressions patched together from fragments of esteemed ideas, desired outcomes, necessary solaces and censored accusations. Raskolnikov's pride encourages him to resolve his problematically ambiguous motivations and his unshakable feelings of moral disquiet through the mitigating trope of ideological rebellion. The comfortable deflection of individual responsibility remains, while he also avails himself of the posture of heroic devotion to a higher moral code.

The ideological justification Raskolnikov tries to attach to his crime ("smash what needs to be smashed") echoes Razumikhin's explanation of the "well known" "views of the socialists" (256). Razumikhin briefs Porfiry Petrovitch: "crime is a protest against the abnormality of the social set-up – that alone and nothing more, no other causes are admitted" (256). Porfiry's laughter provokes Razumikhin to assure him that with the socialists, "one is always a 'victim of the environment' – and nothing else!" (256). The use to which Raskolnikov puts this argument allows Dostoevsky to insinuate its primary evasion of individual responsibility and the dispersal of moral discrimination which it perpetuates.

Haven't you seen children here on the street corners, sent out by their mothers to beg? I've learned where these mothers live, and in what circumstances. Children cannot remain children there. There a seven-year-old is depraved and a thief. But children are the image of Christ: 'Theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.' He taught us to honour and love them, they are the future of mankind ..."

"But what, what can be done, then?" Sonya repeated, weeping hysterically and wringing her hands.

"What can be done? Smash what needs to be smashed, once and for all, and that's it – and take the suffering upon ourselves! What? You don't understand? You'll understand later ... Freedom and power, but above all, power! Over all trembling creatures, over the whole ant-heap!"¹⁰⁶

This passage follows Raskolnikov's explanation to Sonya that, to his mind, she, like himself, has "stepped over"; in which he implies that their respective dissociation from society is the corollary of conscious and justified social rebellion.¹⁰⁷ In the passage quoted here, Raskolnikov redoubles his attempts to justify his criminal activism as a revolutionary reaction against overt symptoms of social injustice. At the same time, though, in his tilts at convention Raskolnikov attempts to divert personal accountability for his crime into a theory of justified schism and reform; this notion is one of the explanations for his crime which offers, to Raskolnikov's mind, to sanction his agency while absolving him of responsibility. By retroactively conscripting his previously abstract speculations into service as 'convictions', Raskolnikov answers his need to claim the murder as an act performed in ideological good faith, rather than self-interest or sheer malevolence. But this need alone is not enough to sustain his allegiance after the practical inadequacy of this 'conviction' (its inability to provide more than theoretical support) manifests. Under its auspices, Raskolnikov can prove to himself that he has acted appropriately, but this proof is not objectively compelling, or persuasive, and the ferment of conscience persists.

Raskolnikov's persisting dissatisfaction with himself and his rationalisations provide unsettling challenges to the authority which he had supposed his idea would

¹⁰⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 329-30.

¹⁰⁷ Raskolnikov's notion that he and Sonya are equals neglects the fact that she had sacrificed something she valued while he had only learnt to value moral communion after deliberately casting it aside. "What sustained her? Surely not depravity? All this shame obviously touched her only mechanically: no true depravity, not even a drop of it, had yet penetrated her heart" (323). And yet, in spite of the purity of Sonya's self-sacrifice she feels herself to be legitimately fallen; to have broken, no matter how justifiably or unwillingly, rules that cannot be broken free of consequences. With Raskolnikov's mother and sister she offered a quick "lost glance, and suddenly looked down" (237). Raskolnikov is disappointed by Sonya's show of self-abasement - her identification with the conventions that deem her fallen - he had hoped to establish a shared front of defiance, the solidarity of dissident non-conformity, to counterbalance the feelings of accusation and exclusion he feels subjected to by the conventions of care he has travestied. Svidrigailov looks to Raskolnikov for the same relief later.

exert. Typically, the uncertainty which these challenges provoke drives Raskolnikov towards a more absurd and isolated posture of superior self-sufficiency.

“Leave me, leave me, all of you!” Raskolnikov cried out frenziedly. “Will you tormentors never leave me! I’m not afraid of you! I’m not afraid of anyone now, not of anyone! Away from me! Alone, I want to be alone, alone, alone!”¹⁰⁸

When left “alone, alone, alone”, Raskolnikov experiences “some strange, sudden calm”¹⁰⁹ and goes out into the city eager “to talk with everyone”.¹¹⁰ In the presence of others Raskolnikov feels accused and hunted and seeks their absence, while in their absence he becomes disoriented and feels the need to test the credibility of his various embryonic convictions against external judgements. Here Raskolnikov’s real trial begins, he seems driven to discover whether or not he can still exist among other people. The experiment does not go well, the sudden calming of his troubled conscience recurs, but only in moments of combative resistance to the dismissive judgements which Raskolnikov automatically presumes others will pass on him. The “cynicism of perdition” with which he initially reacts to the prospect of discovery, suggests an attempt to disengage himself from the kind of psychological burden imposed implicitly by conventional templates of moral conscience.¹¹¹ As long as his “theory” of a higher moral category holds (and whether he belongs to it or not), his rational conviction that murder can be justifiable also survives, and justifies in turn his resistance to the ready-made standards which would condemn him purely, he thinks, as a matter of convention. Raskolnikov’s disdain for the jurisdiction of conventional morality and law, and his conviction of the alternative moral plane which his crime took place on, are mutually reinforcing.

“Don’t be a child Sonya,” he said softly. “How am I guilty before them? Why should I go? What should I tell them? It’s all just a phantom...”¹¹²

Raskolnikov’s violent aversion to accepting or acknowledging any shame is the snag on which his theory will eventually unravel. His ideological reaction against the prospect of being judged by others is galvanised by his aversion to admitting his own nascent

¹⁰⁸ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 153.

¹⁰⁹ *Crime and Punishment*, 154.

¹¹⁰ *Crime and Punishment*, 156.

¹¹¹ *Crime and Punishment*, 94.

¹¹² *Crime and Punishment*; 420.

sympathy with their intuited judgements. In his merely particular failure he holds out the prospect that a higher moral order, the realm of a new word, does in fact exist. While he has not been able to sustain a step over into any new moral order, the merely conventional moral realm is disparaged regardless. As the conviction that his theory of moral impunity will logically absolve him of the conventional anxieties of guilt and shame fades, Raskolnikov's relationship to his "idea" shifts from professing the entitlement of the elect to claiming the diminished responsibility of a hapless devotee. By backsliding in this manner Raskolnikov instinctively salvages the moral framework that, by asserting the inferiority of the law he has broken, mitigates his crime.

Discussing the possibility of criminals keeping their head Zamyotov challenges Raskolnikov, "And you think you could stand it?".¹¹³ Raskolnikov is irked by Zamyotov's presumption, in this challenge, of his normality; similarly, in anticipating the judgements with which conventional law will deem him merely an ordinary criminal Raskolnikov is able to transfer his feelings of outrage over his wrongly slighted self-esteem to energise a pseudo-rational commitment to his act of moral rebellion. His aversion to this anticipated assertion of his ordinariness galvanises his desire to evade detection and condemnation by other ordinary individuals and helps him to repress his compulsion to flaunt his crime: "Again Raskolnikov suddenly felt a terrible urge to 'stick his tongue out.' Shivers momentarily ran down his spine".¹¹⁴ In a pragmatic sense, Raskolnikov wants to outpace or dismiss conventional morality to avoid paying for his crimes but he simultaneously relies on the thrill of having broken rules (rules which imply, for him, the distasteful equality of all those who observe them), to provide him with a feeling of personal superiority to those who accept the limitations of conventional moral law. Essentially, his protest is provoked not by a lack of belief in conventional moral codes, but merely by the conviction that in his case they must be subordinate to his right to complete individualistic freedom.

Raskolnikov's continued denial of the absurdity which his moral rebellion becomes binds him to protests and rationalisations which, appearing increasingly capricious, rely primarily on his hostility to the worldly bodies who will judge him. Even as he begins to show signs of a growing awareness that he had acted intolerably and unjustifiably, he still recoils from the demeaning prospect of condemnation, and thrills in the prospect of proving himself effectively, if not theoretically, above conventional morality by flouting its capacity to reach or impose itself on him: "I'm not

¹¹³ *Crime and Punishment*, 163.

¹¹⁴ *Crime and Punishment*, 163.

going to let them get me. I'll still fight them".¹¹⁵ When he has become more familiar with the bind he has trapped himself in, and with his theories thwarted by his severe *moral* outrage at Svidrigailov's sins, Raskolnikov concedes "spitefully", "do you think I don't seem ludicrous to myself right now?".¹¹⁶ He is confronted by an intrinsic similarity between the theories which had ostensibly justified his individual rebellion and the principles which justify conventional moral structures, and by the dependence of his arguments on moral logic he had claimed to dismiss.

When Svidrigailov, disappointed in his hopes of a sympathetic hearing from Raskolnikov, seeks to put his knowledge of Raskolnikov's crime to good use as a source of power over his sister, he represents Raskolnikov's motivation as originating in "a so-so little theory" involving an obsession with Napoleon and the idea that "men of genius disregarded isolated evil and stepped over it without hesitation".¹¹⁷ Svidrigailov continues his trivialising diagnosis of Raskolnikov's monumental folly by nakedly stating the crux of his action and his error, "he seems to have imagined that he, too, was a man of genius".¹¹⁸ This, of course, is only half of Raskolnikov's mistake: regardless of whether or not it legitimately relates to him, his theory as to the moral impunity of genius is shown by Dostoevsky to propose a category which does not exist as a moral consideration (it pertains to what he considers an *inhuman void* of moral inclinations, capable of sustaining neither altruism, guilt nor the thrill of transgression). The nature of Raskolnikov's suffering conveys an impression of the essential inhumanity necessary to live apart from a dependence on moral communication. His inability to attain the comfortable immorality which he supposes to be characteristic of a moral conscience that sees beyond mere convention, is not simply a case of having mistaken his dissatisfied normality for genius.¹¹⁹ The kind of character necessary to support the stepping over Raskolnikov had planned is shown to depend on an alien, incommunicable, and morally irrelevant condition; an inhuman separateness quite unlike the triumphant *involvement* and power which he had envisaged as the moral rebel's due. Raskolnikov's remoteness from the higher moral category he idealises is evident first and foremost in his plotting out his course to genius and later in his persisting reliance on conventional moral terms in his practical and emotional response to his crime (he hides, he feels anxiety). His failure to step over in the manner he had

¹¹⁵ *Crime and Punishment*, 421.

¹¹⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 482.

¹¹⁷ *Crime and Punishment*, 491.

¹¹⁸ *Crime and Punishment*, 491.

planned merely proves *to him*, and in the terms of his theory, that the conventions of ordinary human morality have a claim on him.

“I’m a scoundrel! That’s the whole point! But even so, I won’t look at it with your eyes ...”

“... and now more than ever I fail to understand my crime! Never, never have I been stronger or more certain than now!...”

.... But as he was uttering this last exclamation, his eyes suddenly met Dunya’s, and so great, so great was the anguish for him in those eyes that he came involuntarily to his senses. He felt that after all he had made these two poor women unhappy. After all it was he who had caused...”¹²⁰

Dostoevsky is not primarily concerned with discriminating legitimate hierarchies of secular morality, or the politics of justified transgression (these are Raskolnikov’s concerns, the contentious grounds of his sanction for murder), but rather with conveying the dangerous fertility of uncertainty and secular moral ambiguity. He shows how readily, in such conditions, phantom convictions solidify into dangerous idols of authority, capable of isolating individuals from the tempering responsibilities of moral agreement.

Porfiry instructs Raskolnikov, “give yourself directly to life, without reasoning . . . - it will carry you straight to shore and set you on your feet. What shore? How do I know? I only believe that you have much life ahead of you”.¹²¹ Porfiry continues: “Who am I? I’m a finished man, that’s all. A man who can, perhaps, sympathize and empathize, who does, perhaps, even know something - but completely finished”.¹²² Here is the layering of wisdom, the passing on of knowledge, the past invoking a healthy future through its faith - hope is sustained - Porfiry Petrovich is a finished man, and in this sense both spent and completed, of the past but nevertheless able to address the present from a fixed point. If we consider Raskolnikov as the emblem of the poor deluded boys and girls that Dostoevsky saw filling the nihilist ranks, we have in this scene a vignette of the potentially nourishing interchange between selfless authority and the appetite for reform.

¹¹⁹ Phillip Rahv (in “Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*”, *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. René Wellek (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 16-38) sees *Crime and Punishment* as depicting precisely this mistake.

¹²⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 518-19.

¹²¹ *Crime and Punishment*, 460.

¹²² *Crime and Punishment*, 460.

Porfiry, like Sonya, imposes an “implacable sentence” on Raskolnikov, enforcing an arduous awakening to his own moral contrition and personal shame.¹²³ Raskolnikov repeatedly flees from this process; to Svidrigailov, for instance, in the hope of hearing a new word that will grant him an easier passage: “Oh, how sick he was of it all! / And yet here he was hurrying to Svidrigailov; could it be that he expected something *new* from him - directions, a way out? People do grasp at straws!”¹²⁴ Svidrigailov’s tales of murder and debauchery in fact force Raskolnikov to admit his sympathy with the *old* words of conventional morality; he is repulsed by Svidrigailov’s transgressions, and subsequently feels himself caught in a ridiculous contradiction.

“Stop, stop your mean, vile anecdotes, you depraved, mean, sensual man!”

“Look at our Schiller, what a Schiller, just look at him! *Ou va-t-elle la vertu se nicher?* And you know, I’ll go on telling you such things on purpose, just to hear your little outcries. Delightful!”

“Isn’t it! And do you think I don’t seem ludicrous to myself right now?”

Raskolnikov muttered spitefully.

Svidrigailov was roaring with laughter[.]¹²⁵

And after all, it would seem that Svidrigailov had been drawn to Raskolnikov for similarly wishful reasons: Raskolnikov, as the self-styled amoral murderer,¹²⁶ offers a potential source of deliverance from a growing sense of the exiling inhumanity of his own intolerable corruption. Alluding to the murder Svidrigailov tells Raskolnikov, “You have your own opinion and were not afraid to have it. It was that in you that drew my curiosity”;¹²⁷ he is also on the alert for something *new*, “directions, a way out” of his own predicament.

In practice, quests for new words in Dostoevsky’s novels are more akin to the strategic process of “making sense” of himself, in which the pawnbroker (in “The Meek Girl”) seeks to forge, from his autonomous wife, a sympathetic judge to affirm the sense which supports his preferred self-image. Raskolnikov and

¹²³ *Crime and Punishment*, 463.

¹²⁴ *Crime and Punishment*, 463.

¹²⁵ *Crime and Punishment*, 482.

¹²⁶ Raskolnikov’s explanation of his notion of a higher moral category – a category of people whose capacity to sin with a quiet conscience reflects an unconventionally broad moral license – is not made to Svidrigailov directly; Svidrigailov overhears Raskolnikov’s confession to Sonya and his attempts to make her accept his theory that higher moral beings can commit crimes with impunity, if committed in service of their (and history’s) higher purpose. Svidrigailov associates Raskolnikov with his theory from the outset, his disappointment in finding Raskolnikov unable to maintain it as a vital *raison d’être* mirrors Raskolnikov’s own. Svidrigailov is equally frustrated by the breakdown of Raskolnikov’s relationship with his ‘theory’, as its persistence would have provided him with a comrade, and assuaged his own need for rationalisations to quash his growing revulsion with the ghosts of his intractable sadism (murder, rape, child abuse), and with himself.

Svidrigailov are each drawn to the other in the hope of hearing a new word.¹²⁸ The initial attraction is born, though, out of a tacit sense of solidarity and a suspected like-mindedness, suggesting that what they actually hope to hear is an external justification which will illuminate and consolidate the suitability of the code by which they *already* seek to live. Their seeking out each other's potential accord and approval reflects the tenuous and unconsolidated nature of purely individualistic assurances: both Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov are unable to dismiss the anxiety of being unable to prove to themselves in isolation that their notions of moral impunity had not been simply permissive solipsistic fictions.

* * * * *

Raskolnikov is associated with death on two occasions; in the second, Marmeladov's, he seems to perceive an avenue by which he can atone for the first. In his lurch towards the possibility of some form of atonement, a mute logic makes it clear that Raskolnikov has not floated away to a realm beyond the conventional consideration of good and evil. Had he risen in a triumphal sense, he would be unlikely to show a tendency towards binding himself back to society through self-mortification or penance.

At the scene of Marmeladov's accident (which ultimately proves fatal) Raskolnikov is "surprisingly excited".¹²⁹ He calls for a doctor and slips "something" to the police for carrying the injured man home; four times he assures the crowd "I'll pay".¹³⁰ The tragic circumstance of Raskolnikov's meeting with the Marmeladov family provides an opportunity to do penance, reassert his potential and establish an understanding with those to whom he will be able to make sense of himself as he wishes to, rather than as he fears he must. Sonya offers the prospect of community without shame. "I'm just coming from a dead man's house, some official who died ... I gave them all my money ... and besides, I was just kissed by a being who, even if I had killed someone, would still ... in short, I saw another being there ...".¹³¹ Raskolnikov is buoyed by the prospect of a new community capable of recontextualising his shame. As with the pawnbroker's attempts to train and control the meek girl's understanding of his fall, Raskolnikov's excitement is generated by an instinctively parasitic recourse to a

¹²⁷ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 466.

¹²⁸ Effectively, 'new words' would deliver an unconventional truth or code of conduct capable of providing a new basis or convention capable of normalising attitudes and actions which had previously constituted unacceptable transgressions.

¹²⁹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 176.

¹³⁰ *Crime and Punishment*, 176.

prospectively vulnerable source of external approval (Sonya's own perception of her moral state, for instance, is ignored). Raskolnikov's excited hopes of establishing a new community and moral norm, removed from the circumstances surrounding his crime, are immediately compromised, though, as he returns to his room to find his mother and sister waiting: "A cry of rapturous joy greeted Raskolnikov's appearance. Both women rushed to him. But he stood like a dead man; a sudden, unbearable awareness struck him like a thunderbolt. And his arms would not rise to embrace them; they could not".¹³²

When Raskolnikov begins to confess his crime to Sonya, his attempts to simultaneously convey the rationalisations which exonerate his actions render his account opaque. Sonya interjects: "You'd better tell me straight out ... without examples".¹³³ Raskolnikov's rhetorical flourishes, whether of self-promotion or depreciation, are means of persuading himself of his perspicacity and self-control. Requesting an account of the bare bones of Raskolnikov's crime, Sonya seeks intuitively to unravel the strategies of his selective understanding and to uncover a clear unprivileged view of the basis of his confession. Straight out, and without examples, the old lady is not a louse, he is not stepping over, and Lizaveta is not conveniently invisible. In the posture of combative challenge to authority, Raskolnikov has been able to shelter in spontaneous reflexes of self-preservation. When finally he does speak without "thinking about his words or weighing them", it is to entreat his mother, "Mama, whatever happens, whatever you hear about me, whatever they tell you about me, will you still love me as you do now?".¹³⁴ Though it might be suggested that Raskolnikov is simply gauging a last resort of approval, his spontaneous supplication seems rather to herald the final erosion both of the rationale of moral revolution which supported his combative resistance of conventional judgment, and of the conceptual isolation which sustains his pride. Raskolnikov's perception of himself as an exceptional being serves throughout as a bulwark against the admission that his flight is from the prospective contempt and condemnation his crime warrants, and similarly from the intensity of his own contempt for what he considers a grotesque and demeaning miscalculation. "My mother, my sister, how I loved them! Why do I hate them now? Yes, I hate them, hate them physically, I cannot bear having them near me

¹³¹ *Crime and Punishment*, 191.

¹³² *Crime and Punishment*, 192.

¹³³ *Crime and Punishment*, 415.

¹³⁴ *Crime and Punishment*, 514.

...".¹³⁵ Raskolnikov knows that his own answer to the question Dunya asks of Svidrigailov - "And remorse of conscience? You mean you deny him all moral feeling? Is that what he's like?"¹³⁶ - will force him finally to admit the absurdity of his relationship with his theory. He is not at all *like that*, but to acknowledge this, as Svidrigailov observes, is to admit his lack of genius: "Now that," asserts Svidrigailov, "for a vain young man, is truly humiliating, especially in our age...".¹³⁷ In Raskolnikov's plea to his mama, the fear of humiliation and punishment is apparent, but far stronger is the fear of loneliness, isolation or abandonment. In this supplication it becomes apparent that, after the killing, much of Raskolnikov's moral accounting has served to discredit his fear that he has wilfully relinquished a right to something which he simultaneously discovers he cherishes above all. Raskolnikov is scared of what his crime makes him (inhuman, unlovable), and scared that the superior moral isolation he had plotted for himself will actually be imposed in the form of punitive exile.

... as if indeed he could imagine thinking now about the same things as before, and being interested in the same themes and pictures he had been interested in ... still so recently. He even felt almost like laughing, yet at the same time his chest was painfully constricted. It was as if he now saw all his former past, and former thoughts, and former tasks, and former themes, and former impressions, and this whole panorama, and himself, and everything, everything, somewhere far down below, barely visible under his feet ... It seemed as if he were flying upwards somewhere, and everything was vanishing from his sight ... It seemed to him that at that moment he had cut himself off, as with scissors, from everyone and everything.¹³⁸

Raskolnikov's perspective seems to allude to the titanic altitude of a statue or monument, but it is reminiscent also of the bird's-eye view of Gogol's madman Poprishchin after the evaporation of his personality into the atmosphere over Europe.¹³⁹ In Byron's *Cain*, Lucifer flies the dissenting Cain through space, showing him a celestial realm filled with other planets and stars, as opposed to gods or heaven, as an insinuation of his own right to individualist self-determination and an incitement, therefore, of rebellion against conventional order. In contrast to the implied allure of responding to the sudden emptiness of heaven by becoming a man-god, Poprishchin's astral projection expresses the desolation and hopelessness of his sense of orphanhood

¹³⁵ *Crime and Punishment*, 275.

¹³⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 491.

¹³⁷ *Crime and Punishment*, 491.

¹³⁸ *Crime and Punishment*, 114-15.

¹³⁹ Nikolai Gogol, "Diary of a Madman", *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. Ronald Wilks (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), 17-41, 41.

and displacement: "Press a wretched orphan to your breast! There's no place for him in this world!"¹⁴⁰ Raskolnikov's intuition that he has cut himself off from the realm of conventional interaction and meaning is further confused by a struggle to validate as 'real' the favoured explanation: 'statue'; without having to concede to the interpretation suggested by actual facts: 'irrelevant alien'. This desire for realism leads Raskolnikov to Sonya, who he feels cannot judge him, and then to Svidrigailov, who he hopes will approve his stepping over and rescue him from acknowledging his mere normality.

The nature of the strange isolation Raskolnikov experiences after the crime suggests that he has unwittingly dissolved into a wraith-like inhabitant of abstractions, problematically alien to the ordinary fleshly concerns of his fellow creatures. Raskolnikov's neglect of Lizaveta's death alongside her sister, "as if I hadn't killed her", appears "strange" to him.¹⁴¹ This point of disquiet reflects an oversight allowing him to relate to his guilt as a theoretical lapse rather than a crime against people. His equanimity depends, therefore, on attaining an inhuman self-sufficiency. Amid Raskolnikov's subsequent strivings for the easy conscience of amorality, a sense of personal unworthiness is also implied. What was meant to be a morally liberating stepping-over has proven to be a stepping-off into a dizzy chaos.

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Hm ... yes ... man has it all in his hands, and it all slips through his fingers from sheer cowardice ... That is an axiom ... I wonder, what are people most afraid of? A new step, their own new word, that's what they're most afraid of ... I babble too much, however. That's why I don't do anything, because I babble. However, maybe it's like this: I babble because I don't do anything. I've learned to babble over this past month, lying in a corner day in and day out, thinking about ... cuckooland.¹⁴²

In Dostoevsky's work, the generation who perceive themselves as the inheritors of a social order held together by the ideologically devalued language of eloquence frequently seeks or aspires to utter a 'new word'. The 'new word' will communicate an ideological illumination or rebirth capable of precipitating devotion to principles abstracted from contingent individual circumstance and interest. It owes more to frustrated reaction than ideological inspiration. Porfiry confides to Raskolnikov that he regards him as "one of those men who could have their guts cut out, and would stand

¹⁴⁰ Gogol, "Diary of a Madman", 41.

¹⁴¹ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 275.

and look at his torturers with a smile – provided he’s found faith, or God. Well, go and find it, and you will live”.¹⁴³ In the absence of this “faith, or God”, Raskolnikov’s thirst forces his attempt to construct and impose his own ‘new word’ as a legitimate figure of devotion.

In *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*, Richard Peace notes:

... ambiguity under whatsoever guise it appeared could not be tolerated by the radicals. Thus Dobrolyubov attacked the liberals for their equivocation on social reform, branding the discrepancy between their words and their deeds as ‘Oblomovism’^[144]. Ideal human behaviour, on the other hand, as prescribed by Chernyshevsky in *What is to be done?* is always straightforward, clear-cut and rational – it has that singleness of purpose which befits the monistic nature of man.¹⁴⁵

Crime and Punishment was written in response to an atmosphere of competing ideologies. In *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s*, Charles Moser explores the characteristic traits of special pleading which are apparent within depictions of the radical nihilists by both their sympathisers and opponents. Given their inevitably common fund of raw material, these depictions typically rely on contrasting and competing rhetorical conventions to selectively approve those elements of reality that validate their convictions. To the neutral or undecided reader these conventions can be seen as competing to affirm the veracity and persuasive potency of the convictions in which they are based.

The radicals, Chernyshevsky and Pisarev for example, wrote for the young, “and it never occurred to them that adult standards might be applied to their production by men like Katkov and Dostoevsky”.¹⁴⁶ Their negligence is perhaps aesthetically

¹⁴² *Crime and Punishment*, 4.

¹⁴³ *Crime and Punishment*, 460.

¹⁴⁴ Ivan Goncharov’s novel *Oblomov* (1859) depicts the existence of a land-owning nobleman, Ilya Oblomov, whose occasional bursts of intellectual activity and esteem for commitment cannot overcome the inertia of his privileged, insular and characteristically sleepy existence. Oblomov fails to win his ideal bride, losing her to his best friend (a German man of action), while his estates are gradually siphoned off by corrupt underlings he does not keep in check. “Oblomovism” implies the remote dreaminess and negligent lethargy of a gentry raised in the certainty of their position of benevolent privilege, but who are increasingly superfluous to, and unable to keep in step with, a changing social structure.

¹⁴⁵ Richard Peace, *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 33.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Moser, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860’s* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964), 26. In the passage below Chernyshevsky’s new man, Lopukhov, is debating the reception of an ostensibly charitable act of self-sacrifice- of the unsubtlety to which Chernyshevsky characteristically resorts in his determination to fuse characterisation with ideological explication and allusion:

That will distress her. ‘Oh, what a sacrifice he made for me!’ But I hadn’t been planning to make sacrifices. I haven’t been foolish enough to make any so far; and I hope I never will. I did what was best for me. I’m not the sort of person who

mitigating, but, whether cynical or in earnest, this focus on a Russian youth made pliable by their thirst for certainties is morally suspect.¹⁴⁷ Moser quotes V.V. Rozanov's attempt to illuminate the nature of the audience to which radical criticism and propaganda were addressed: "An adult needs to know the *truth*, while an adolescent needs to *deify* the instructor, without which faith in him is lost and the teaching itself dissipated".¹⁴⁸

Dostoevsky exploits the foundations of this concession: the appeal of the clear and simplistic absolutism of nihilism, particularly for confused youths, with limited experience of the world, limited emotional ties, and a tendency to define themselves in nonconformist reaction against a society in which they feel deprived of a fulfilling position or role, and the adolescents' selective and egocentric tunnel vision are firstly allowed as givens. But these givens and the relationships to abstract ideals which they facilitate, are eroded by a reality which Dostoevsky allows to expose the feet of clay which inevitably root emotivistic 'authorities' or ideals to a disenchanting world of chaos and compromise.¹⁴⁹

makes sacrifices. No one is. It's a fallacious concept. Sacrifice is all stuff and nonsense. One does what's most pleasurable. But go and try to explain that to her! It's theoretically comprehensible, but as soon as a person is confronted with the facts, he becomes emotional.

(*What Is to Be Done?*, 149-50).

In his own certainty of the propriety of this complaint against a social reality dominated by irrational emotional bonds to defunct traditions, Chernyshevsky produces a positive statement of secular ideology (in comparison to Dostoevsky's negative statement in *Crime and Punishment*) which submits itself unwittingly to a self-parodying obliviousness to the practical limits of positivistic truths. It is a kind of unwitting parody utilised similarly in deliberate literary challenges depicting the practical limits of the radicals' positivism. Lopukhov is in the vanguard of Chernyshevsky's 'new men', "this type appeared quite recently but now it's propagating quickly" (*What Is to Be Done?*, 212). He registers the tension of the first engagement, wherein theoretical lucidity can promote an emergent challenge to the status quo, the subsequently manifest inertia of which is sign enough that the challenge has scored a hit. All the traumas associated with living in the conventional world along the *avant-garde* principles of rational individualism, or Chernyshevsky's personal vision of socialism, are included as problems which reflect the first inadequacies of a soon to be obsolete *status quo*. What is uncomfortable or awkward now, will become normal once the world at large has caught up with the new men who will suffer righteously in the meantime.

¹⁴⁷ In *The Idiot*, Myshkin bemoans (with sympathy and anguish) the rush to atheism by Russian youths deprived of traditional certainties. They cannot *exist*, he implies, without something more than material values in which to put their faith. Like any other romantic idealisation, this kind of devotion exposes individuals to the possibility of exploitation by others serving purely finite political or personal interests, who do not share but clearly recognise the nature of their thirst and their need to quench it, and the vulnerability this need implies. Of course, Chernyshevsky, like many other proselytising radicals (whether conservative, reformist or something other), *sincerely* believed he was aiding these lost youths by showing them a way forward in which he *sincerely* believed. This sincerity (as compared to the cynical ambivalence which facilitates the persuasive efforts of The Spirit in Clough's *Dipsychus and The Spirit*) is no less suspect, from Dostoevsky's perspective, it only made the certainties nurtured by such secular positivism all the more dangerous.

¹⁴⁸ Moser, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ In the journal of the raw youth Arkady Dolgoruky (the text of *An Accidental Family*), Dostoevsky depicts the collision of this 'adolescent' need to deify or idealise aspects of reality with an adult world of ambiguities, ambivalent facts, and irrational events. Dostoevsky and Nikolai Leskov, two of the most

Raskolnikov's antipathy to the chatter of the Russian intelligentsia, "I was so sick, so sick of all this babble then!",¹⁵⁰ is representative of a wider frustration. The "circles" at which Raskolnikov has become so overstuffed with mere words have repulsed Razumikhin similarly, while the Underground Man has gone irretrievably and self-consciously adrift in the reactionary isolation of his scrambled chatter.¹⁵¹

For radicals like Raskolnikov, or Turgenev's Bazarov, who react against convention and tradition, 'old words' and the eloquent conventions that served them seemed merely a dissipating anachronism. Eloquence was shunned and disparaged by the "new people"; their very demeanour deliberately declared its redundancy.¹⁵² While they considered themselves men of rational certainties, words suggested a recourse to persuasive manipulations of emotivist sympathies (open persuasion also risks the exposure of the rationalisations on which these certainties are ostensibly founded to the subjectivity of interpretation). In *The Idiot*, Ganya Ivolgin, recovering his composure after an uncharacteristic burst of openness in conversation with Myshkin, defends his credentials as a serious and mature individual: "By the way, you don't think I'm usually such a chatterbox do you?"¹⁵³ For committed individuals like Ganya or Bazarov, explaining oneself, seeking another's approval, suggests a concession that the

accomplished and enduring of the Russian anti-nihilist writers, had personally experienced a similar collision, each starting out in youthful sympathy with, and proceeding towards a mature opposition to, radical ideology. Along with Moser, Joseph Frank, René Wellek and Richard Peace, appear to be in accord in seeing *Crime and Punishment* as a novel that, while transcending its genre and circumstance, among the antinihilist novels of the 1860s, is nevertheless significantly depleted without them. For Wellek and Moser in particular, the alignment of Dostoevsky with the antinihilist conventions of the period is particularly pertinent in clarifying some of the broadest moral dilemmas raised by the novel (see: "Bakhtin's View of Dostoevsky: 'Polyphony' and 'Carnavalesque' ", *Russian Formalism: A Retrospective Glance*, eds. R.L. Jackson & Stephen Rudy (New Haven: Yale Center for International & Area Studies, 1985), 231-241; and *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1964). Moser, for example, describes Dostoevsky as, "the most outstanding antinihilist writer of the 1860's" (*Antinihilism* . . . , 68); and it is by tying Raskolnikov's crime to the rhetorical context in this ideological discourse that Wellek, reacting against Bakhtin's tendency to relativise every virtue and transgression in Dostoevsky's work, points confidently to the novel's clear endorsement of the commandment "thou shalt not kill".

¹⁵⁰ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 418.

¹⁵¹ In Turgenev's "Hamlet of the Schigorovsky District" (*Sketches from a Hunter's Album* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1967), 179-209), the titular character is also a victim of the dissipation and disorientation engendered by endless abstract discussion, and of the distempered antipathy towards ambiguous reality and finite choice which this inability to verify any single abstract conviction typically engenders.

¹⁵² It is a commonplace in literary depictions, whether sympathetic or critical, of the 1860s nihilists to stress their unorthodox disregard for the niceties of polite society and their often deliberate flouting of good manners as a means of declaring their independence from and protest against tradition. Turgenev's Bazarov is variously impertinent, ungrateful, rude, sullen and abrasive in his arrogant disdain of convention; Chernyshevsky's "new men" are empirical men of fact and empirical theory, sensitivity or empathy are not in their repertoire; and Dostoevsky's radicals are wilfully tactless and proudly unsympathetic. For a more thorough survey of this representative trope of the studiously dispassionate abruptness of the radical nihilists see Charles Moser's, *Antinihilism in the Russian Novel of the 1860's*.

¹⁵³ Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 130.

“rightness” of their ideals is not self-evident, and that this “rightness” might in fact depend on their personal representations of the sense it makes to them.¹⁵⁴

While, as Porfiry suggests, Raskolnikov might accept any suffering for the sake of a conviction, he cannot tolerate the uncertainty which seems intrinsic to abstract and moral discourse in the absence of divine or external authority. The pressure Raskolnikov experiences in his inability to align himself with any external moral framework, and which induces his individualistic “theory”, is apparent also in the intolerable weight of uncertain suspicion which Porfiry manipulates in an attempt to induce Raskolnikov’s independent acknowledgment of his guilt and shame. Fencing with his prey, Porfiry explains to Raskolnikov that a premature arrest provides the criminal with “moral support”.¹⁵⁵ By placing the criminal in a “definite position”, Porfiry suggests, “I would be, so to speak, defining him and reassuring him psychologically, so that he would be able to hide from me in his shell: he would understand finally that he is under arrest”.¹⁵⁶ In the police station after the crime Raskolnikov’s thoughts run along similar lines. He is tempted to confess “just to get it off my back!”.¹⁵⁷ His uncertainty as to the degree of suspicion he has aroused, and over the implications of his unwanted moral quiet taints his freedom indelibly.

Raskolnikov’s attempt to step over is forced by the same thirst for certainty which Myshkin associates with fanatical atheism. In Dostoevsky’s conception of the psychology of moral orientation the denial of God inevitably leads individuals to

¹⁵⁴ Bazarov’s generally reticent manner and his reluctance to engage in verbal justification, hints at an assumed suspicion or antipathy towards eloquence and rationale. A similar disdain for mere principles and empty talk, exacerbated by the heights of meaningfulness to which these idealistic individuals essentially aspire, paradoxically torments the Underground Man in the stream of his constant chatter. His frustration with the incapacity of abstracted theory to achieve consensus or absolute justification, or to locate an authoritative mandate for convinced action, infuses his eloquent rationalisations and theorising with a potent vitriolic self-abhorrence. The causal relationship between action and sweet eloquence appears dubious; undoubtedly eloquence can sanctify whatever choice is eventually made, but it cannot offer unimpeachable directives to do one thing instead of another. Unable to tolerate the perpetually shifting ground of moral sanction, individuals begin to align their actions with an entirely separate code of plausibility: aware that there are no unimpeachable justifications for the actions which, for whatever reasons, they take or refuse, in the pre-emptive moral dialogue they often opt for silence, postponing moral evaluations until consequences arise.

In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill attacks a similar tendency of responding to the need for agreement and compromise with a deliberate censorious silence; a posture through which individuals and groups refuse to entertain the possibility that any perspective other than their own could possibly have any merit or warrant interaction. “To refuse a hearing to an opinion because they are sure it is false is to assume that *their* certainty is the same thing as *absolute* certainty. All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility” (*On Liberty* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 77). This assumption, Mill continues, is complemented by the condemnatory assuredness which is inherent in censorious silence.

¹⁵⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 338.

¹⁵⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 339.

¹⁵⁷ *Crime and Punishment*, 104.

demand absolute authority from merely finite proxies. To force reality to meet their own demands they brutalise an ambivalent moral horizon into submission.

The abstract theoretical chatter which is necessary in sustaining the apparent vitality of secular absolutism is vehemently denounced by Razumikhin:

Listen to me. I announce to you that you're all, to a man, babblers and braggarts! Some little suffering comes along, and you brood over it like a hen over an egg! Even there you steal from other authors! There isn't a sign of independent life in you! You're made of spermaceti ointment, with whey instead of blood in your veins! I don't believe a one of you! The first thing you do in any circumstances is try not to resemble a human being!¹⁵⁸

The implicit emptiness of the terms of this sterile babble, which facilitates such shallow appropriations and subjective usage of ostensibly constant terms, reveals a further dimension of the trial that Raskolnikov claims to be making. He has told himself that his 'trial' is just words, and at its point of origin it is. Raskolnikov essentially shares Razumikhin's revulsion with the lip-service paid to grand schemes and ideals, but Raskolnikov reacts by going to the opposite extreme: where Razumikhin disdains the meaningless core of this babble, Raskolnikov seeks to reify the merely theoretical contentions by acting as if they defined an actual state.¹⁵⁹

While he maintains it, Raskolnikov's allegiance to his idea illustrates the destructive potential of such earnest infatuation and unsubtle certainty. The self-serving lip-service to radicalism displayed by Dunya's suitor Luzhin, and the sincere but empty headed liberalism of Lebezyatnikov, represent the kind of atmosphere from which Raskolnikov's violent rebellion hopes to release him. The eloquent babble of interminable abstract debate, intermingled with the self-interested scheming of competing self-interests, repulses him.

Overview

Secular ideology is reified by Dostoevsky to a point where it almost exists as a thing, an evil genius which lures its devotees into disaster. This reification is performed, though,

¹⁵⁸ *Crime and Punishment*, 167. Razumikhin might have been addressing the Underground Man, his accusation echoes the latter's disdainful evaluation of himself and of his peers who, like him, are born of an idea.

¹⁵⁹ Recalling his own intoxication with "the whole *truth*" - a truth into which Belinsky had initiated him in 1846, incorporating "the whole *sanctity* of the future communistic society" - Dostoevsky notes in *A Writer's Diary* that the "new ideas of the time had tremendous appeal for us in Petersburg; they seemed to

as the necessary prelude to an exorcism which is intended to restore the body of Russia, through its constituents, to an authentic possession by Christian faith.

Dostoevsky depicts the kind of relationship which his characters are compelled to form with abstract systems of their own creation as the manifestation of an intrinsic human impulse which had been diverted from its proper path. It is a reality of Dostoevsky's faith that secular independence is automatically conflated with individualistic constructs of absolute authority (emotivism). While Dostoevsky depicts the multifaceted ambiguity of the relationships between individuals and circumstantially constructed ideals, in evaluating their role solely in the terms they arrogate - that is, from within an absolutist mindset - he is compelled to impose a judgement on behalf of the moral reality he believes in (or favours).

In *Crime and Punishment*, as in *Demons* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, individuals' ideas participate with the characters; they are real presences which catalyse murder. But as "participants", these ideas do not offer the associated individuals exoneration or alibis for the consequences they engender. It is implicit in Dostoevsky's various notions of ideological infection that the possession itself is a symptom betraying a vulnerability of moral negligence, apathy, or egotism; a somnambulistic state which individuals can awake from, but which, rather than being mitigated by ignorance and absolved by enlightenment, remains a sin of negligence for which the awake self remains culpable.

Dostoevsky's hopes of anathematising and exorcising secular and individualistic idealism are carried by the isolation and suffering which his realities impose on individuals who depend on subjective compensatory convictions to offer the kind of external moral template provided by divine authority. It is often noted that while serving his moral intentions so well (intentions which are often abrupt and reactionary), the realities he depicts seem remarkably free from the disruptive affectation of doctrinaire or prescriptive characterisation; these are present but always subordinated in the close mechanics of the narrative to the ambiguities and inconsistencies which are so vital to engaging character building. Having taken Dostoevsky's own moral intention into account, it is possible to react quite differently to the reality his argument is predicated on. Discounting his other predicate, that humanity must have an authority above it, his representations of individuals' responses to uncertainty provide provocative examples of the burdens which habits of absolutism impose on individuals

be sacred and moral in the highest degree and, most of all, they seemed to be universal – the future law of all humanity without exception" (*A Writer's Diary - Volume I, 1873-1876*, 285).

who seek authority in an essentially multifaceted moral scene. In so doing Dostoevsky becomes a subject also of the kind of dilemma he depicts: his characters' attempts to approve credible authorities around which to order moral preferences and evaluate purpose follow paths his own reactionary affirmation of God had also travelled. In this sense, Dostoevsky's ideological deportment resembles Myshkin's: personal prejudices, weaknesses, ignorance and anxiety aside, both act in the name of something they believe to be higher than themselves, but are at the same time *personally dependent* on the vitality of the "something higher" which their belief alone vivifies.

When no common foundation for idealistic activism can be affirmed, scepticism, disinterested scrutiny of actual facts and beliefs, often appears the only credible means of advancing or validating (or even consummating) idealistic awareness.¹⁶⁰ Together, the two tendencies (idealism and scepticism) suggest faculties of proposition and criticism which attain a fertile partnership in each nullifying a certain quality in the other. The remains are the virtue of the attempt and the virtue of the veracity with which the attempt is qualified and absorbed by concerns that disparage it, but which, in the process, are marked by its impression and thereby assimilate the "attempt" into a broader discourse. The correction of wrongful enthusiasms suggests at least something of the nature of a positive moral position; for Dostoevsky all secular absolutes are wrongful enthusiasms and their corrective erosion, the sceptical impulse, implicitly recommends the logical necessity of divine faith, the one ideal he exonerates of finite or secular origins.

Frank defends Dostoevsky against charges that he had sought merely to vilify the radicals, claiming, "Dostoevsky was rather striving to warn them against the calamitous results he could foresee flowing from the ideas by which they were now being inspired".¹⁶¹ Dostoevsky's striving, though, never loses sight of the insidious reality of these calamitous results; his warnings do not carry the complementary advocacy of a pragmatic idealism because secular idealism and the calamities of activism were, to his mind, two stages of the same 'disease'. Dostoevsky is not, that is, suggesting a more

¹⁶⁰ A good example of this kind of reaction is formulated in Hermann Broch's *The Guiltless*, a novel which sorts through the moral disengagement of the German, and European, population, between the World Wars; and the feeling of existing in a vacuum of common authoritative values, a feeling which suited the rhetoric and implementation of fascism so well. "But now that man himself has been transposed into limitlessness, the good is losing, no, it has already lost the force that gave it direction; for in a multidimensional world there are no longer any goals to aim at and absolute direction can no longer be maintained by a turning toward, but only by a turning away from, that is to say, no longer by a turning toward the good, but only by a turning away from earthly evil" (*The Guiltless*, trans. Ralph Manheim; 1974 (Evanston, Illinois: The Marlboro Press / Northwestern University Press, 2000); 264).

¹⁶¹ Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years 1865-71*, 60.

cautious or proportioned implementation of secular ideologies, he is attempting to show that they are inherently inadequate to the needs which induce them. While he does not vilify idealism (which remains for him a natural tendency open to corrupting influences when separated from its divine governor) it seems clear that Dostoevsky *does* mean to denounce the negligent abstraction from reality and from others which individuals willingly consent to in maintaining their essentially self-solacing visions of order and authority. It is not only the active protests of secular idealists but also the denials - the compromises they impose on multifaceted and complex moral issues - which constitute the corrosive forces of secular absolutism. Dostoevsky's vilifications are, nevertheless, conflicted by his own need to affirm the existence of the authoritative moral code on behalf of which, with a kind of forced certainty, he imposes these judgements as emblematic stays against chaos, and his uncertainty that this affirmation is warranted.

Dostoevsky wrote: "You see, in feeling sorry for the offender, you thus do not feel sorry for the offended, can't you understand this simple thing";¹⁶² forgetting the victim opens the way to the criminal's exoneration. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky circumvents this consideration somewhat, in that Fyodor Karamazov's own moral stance, so to speak, disregards moral obligations in such a way that he essentially courts the same values that bring about his own murder. In *Crime and Punishment* it is only Raskolnikov's initial argument - the pawnbroker is a louse who is living at the expense of others - that suggests any reason why our sympathy should not lie with her, regardless of her innocent sister. Dostoevsky seems caught between conveying to us that Raskolnikov really has committed a horrendous crime, and the necessity that Raskolnikov remains a character with which the reader can sympathise.¹⁶³ Genuine

¹⁶² Dostoevsky, *The Unpublished Dostoevsky: Diaries and Notebooks (1860-81), Volume II*, 117.

¹⁶³ Writing on *Crime and Punishment* in *The Outsider* (London: Pan Books, 1963), Colin Wilson gives a perfect example of the necessarily blinkered path to a 'rational' approval of Raskolnikov's moral rebellion. Wilson champions Raskolnikov as a potent *übermensch* dragged down by a sick society, and justifies ignoring the novel's epilogue (where Raskolnikov finds God) by claiming an incompatibility between the virtues Dostoevsky bestows on Raskolnikov and the likelihood that he would then deem Raskolnikov's idea "*morally wrong*" (182). Wilson seems unwilling to consider, it would seem, the possibility that ideological affinities and individual worth are not intrinsically linked, and that Dostoevsky might have reasons to sympathise with a character whose abstract politics and actions are abominably foolish and destructive. In *Crime and Punishment* fidelity to the letter of intellectually generated ideology ultimately shows naïveté. Dostoevsky gradually reveals Raskolnikov's ignorance of the motivations behind his usage of the rationalisations and abstractions with which he attempts to make *desirable* sense of himself.

Raskolnikov is not a vessel of genuine revolutionary force, misunderstood and weighed down by squeamish mediocrity (as Wilson suggests), but an individual who is frail and self-deluded, but ultimately capable, nevertheless, of coming to terms with the limited credibility of secular ideological absolutism (except as a metaphor dignifying individual commitments and responsibility). Wilson's curious willingness to denounce the Epilogue as a compromised concession to the requirements of a tidy ending - thus discounting Raskolnikov's 'lapse' into convention - exemplifies the partial and capricious reading

victims are given short shrift in the novels though the perpetrator always remains before us as a criminal, and often as a victim also.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, if the actual victims are so readily forgotten - fodder of the communal moral organism - the crimes are not. The abstract guilt of Dmitry, Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov, for instance, is even further abstracted through the emphasis on the sin of patricide, as opposed to any personal or more particular sense of a crime against a particular, prematurely deceased individual. Within that distinction, though, the criminals are rarely “finished” solely by the fact of their crime. Evil is rarely a character trait in Dostoevsky, though a vast array of insidious stupidities and strategic distortions of ambiguity seem to serve and further evil purposes.

Prior to the murder, Raskolnikov galvanises his resolve with an incantation to external determination, “If not reason, then the devil!”: either he has a rational right to his plan or he is the unwitting instrument and victim of an evil.¹⁶⁵ It seems rather that his dubiously rationalised self-interest, his pseudo-reason, consigns him to do the devil’s dirty work. In this instance “reason” and “the devil” are merely two possible names for the same susceptibility in Raskolnikov, either way the effect is the same: either the devil or reason possessed him and killed the old crone. Later he is more sure, reason has given way to the origin of its temptations, “it was the devil killed the old crone”, but *his* crime, he maintains, consists only in having unwittingly, through pride and ignorance, become the devil’s instrument.¹⁶⁶

In Dostoevsky’s work, children often serve as gauges of worldly corruption; their suffering, as both Ivan Karamazov and Raskolnikov testify, attests to an intolerable decay in mutual responsibility and communal nurture, while the impressions left on their plastic developing moral tendencies by the world offer concrete warnings both of present corruptions and the imminent social jeopardy inbred by development in a period of sweeping technological, social and spiritual transitions. The immature

necessary to see Dostoevsky as endorsing Raskolnikov rather than the reality of a wider moral discourse which his actions provoke and clarify.

¹⁶⁴ Raskolnikov, like the self-obsessed father of Netochka Nezvanova, must be included in the list of his victims. An acquaintance of Netochka’s father warns: “You say, Prince, that he’s an interesting fellow. That may well be true, but he creates a most painful impression. In the first place, he’s mad, and in the second, he’s guilty of three crimes, for he’s ruined his wife’s and his daughter’s lives as well as his own” (*Netochka Nezvanova*, 50). Netochka’s father and Raskolnikov are no less culpable for also being victims of the tyrannies of their fixed ideas.

¹⁶⁵ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 72.

¹⁶⁶ *Crime and Punishment*, 420. In a letter introducing, Mikhail Katkov, editor of the *Russian Herald*, to the subject of *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky stressed that, “the murderer is an intelligent y[oung] man and even one of good incli[nations]” (*Complete Letters*, volume 2, 1860-67, 175). This is hardly meant to temper the blow Raskolnikov strikes, it merely points up Raskolnikov’s moral disorientation as a product of abstraction rather than flawed intelligence or intrinsic personal limitation (his lack of genius,

impressionability of children and “unfinished” adults, and their involvement both as victims and perpetrators of transgression, is used by Dostoevsky as a sign of the arbitrariness of secular or decentred moral conventions, and their inability to provide actual and general moral balances to counter subjective ideals and laws which, formed by individual desire or self-interest, seem to offer objective external authority. Nevertheless, like Myshkin, these individuals are *not* innocent of the mistakes their naïvete or infatuations engender. This recognition of culpability is vital to the equally important capacity for redemption, residing in the ability to take responsibility, free of consoling delusions or external compulsion, for the disquiet and destruction which indicate moral transgressions. In essence this “taking” of responsibility *makes* the moral framework. It is the willingness to absorb a personal responsibility to make moral choices, which resuscitates Raskolnikov’s involvement with others. Raskolnikov had expected to keep his place among others, in spite of having wilfully killed another for his own ends, because this crime would be of no matter to his higher category of moral distinctions. He is brought, though, to recognise that only by admitting that it does matter will he be able to regain the place his isolating abstractions had cost him: by acknowledging himself a criminal he re-enters the community and the jurisdiction of its moral conventions for which his isolation has crystallised a desire. However reluctantly, by the end of the novel Raskolnikov has acquired the *taste* for participating in moral agreement.

for example, is merely his own explanation of his failure to graduate to a higher morality, not Dostoevsky’s).

Closing

I would like briefly to re-emphasise Clough's and Dostoevsky's common focus on the problems of merely human or secular transcendent ideals, and on the roles such ideals inherit (as opposed to being able to fulfil) in the coming down to earth of the ostensibly metaphysical (metaphysical literally, where belief in supernatural authority persists) or otherworldly essence of transcendent idealism. For Clough, this merely human focus (which seemed to be all that remained after the disruption of traditions that had ascribed the authority of transcendent ideals to their purportedly external or supernatural origins), is a perspective he cannot repudiate; nor does he take it upon himself to do so. For Dostoevsky this coming down to earth, the corporeality of secular ideals, is a corruption. Though this simplification understates the complex anxieties that are at play in Dostoevsky's opposition to the philosophical and practical implications of secular idealism, it does do justice to his insistence that some transcendent structure must be recognised and approved as a resistance to formlessness (which he perceived to be an inevitable adjunct to the thriving and mutually nurturing moral values of secularism and material individualism). This simplification emphasizes, that is, how Dostoevsky, in comparison to Clough, finds the idea of ambivalent reality abhorrent because he refuses to accept (as he would have to in a merely human world) that there could be no moral stance from which to *absolutely* condemn injustice and its rationalisation, and because he cannot conceive of a 'good' community that is not bound by a mutual recognition of an absolute moral code that transcends mere worldly interests. Finding the idea of ambivalent reality unacceptable then, Dostoevsky opposes it in a way that, though common to Clough's characters, can be seen in Clough's depiction of these common characteristics to be quite capricious and idiosyncratic. In Clough's work absolutism is revealed as merely anachronistic ideology; it reflects individuals' desires, primarily unacknowledged, for a vantage from which the world can be treated as an orderly realm constructed along general and unchanging principles. The evasion or rejection of conclusive frameworks or resolution appears repeatedly in Clough's later poems. It appears both as deliberate artistic strategy (as in *Amours*, where Claude drifts on in what remains predominantly a state of uncommitted uncertainty), and in his simple reluctance to affirm or elicit anything definitive from the circumstances any particular poem might engage with (his poems often have companion pieces which answer, and further vex, a common subject). Because Clough himself refuses to draw conclusions, to force closure, or to enter into the kinds of particular conventions which might have ratified his

characters' desires for embracing transcendent absolutes, he is able to suggest how unmoored such conventions are in the world of ambivalent fact.

To simplify again, in Dostoevsky's works secular ideals are dangerous and intrinsically flawed because they are corrupted by individual interests and the fallibility of human awareness and motivations, while divine ideals are practically flawed, remote and untenable because the contemporary world is corrupt and the common values they appeal to have been obscured and diluted by the intrusions of secularization. For Clough, ideals which make a claim to some special origin or higher moral status, whether ascribed to a divine or secular source of authority, are merely reflections of individuals' and groups' *desire* to exist under the assurance of a moral template that allows them to feel they *can* live a meaningful and good life, and shows them how to do so. Clough's position acknowledges the origin of these desires in the uncertainty which they seek to order, while Dostoevsky seeks to align them with a force of order inherently separate from the chaos it opposes. I have tried to show that this tendency or commitment, which Dostoevsky shares with many of his characters, is itself a symptom of uncertainty, and an ambivalent, morally unprivileged impulse akin to the kinds of dangerous and misleading desire for absolutism which forces Dipsychus to commit to a false ideal, and which, just as importantly, keeps him from recognizing and accepting the nature of moral templates which lead him consciously to struggle with uncertainty, and similarly to reject the kinds of compromises which are involved in committing to any secular construct of meaningful life-goals and moral values. I have tried to show that the refusal to admit the nature of these compromises - for instance, the refusal or inability to admit the impossibility of an absolutely unvexed moral stance in the midst of an ambivalent world - is a burden of absolutism. This burden is apparent in both Clough's and Dostoevsky's depictions of intellectual idealists struggling with metaphysical uncertainty and disorientation. In Clough's work, though, it is shown to be not only a burden but also a chimera, while Dostoevsky's work accepts and promotes, as a necessity of any meaningful existence, the independent reality of this burden (it is itself further shaped by its weight). Both authors were anxious to restore a sense of moral order but from Clough's work we can see the prospect of a modern pragmatic idealism while in Dostoevsky's we see the problems that persist from avoiding this disenchanted, merely human commitment to moral constructs.

In Dostoevsky's work, individuals who esteem transcendent impersonal codes are effectively unable to see the confronting uncertainties of the natural world as anything other than the negation of an ideal. Perceiving the lived-in world as the corruption of an

ideal, they are able to repudiate reality in the ideal's name, indeed they feel it would be wrong not to, and to avail themselves of the psychological assurance provided by a feeling of holding an objectively justified moral grievance against the ambivalent reality which they find so disquieting.

A higher purpose or cause offers the semblance of meaningful moral templates with which to order the formlessness of a merely human existence, the kind of order that had previously been implicit and available in the notion of divine authority. Where these higher causes or ideals are, or are seen as, merely the inflation of subjective moral intuitions or partial truths (as is often the case depicted in these works), the individuals who depend on them are forced to resort to isolating selective affirmations, which reflect a kind of fanaticism for *certainly* as much as for any specific body of convictions.

With secularisation occurring in Russia intertwined with sweeping social changes (the disruption of autocracy at a variety of levels), the demand for absolute assurances and directives and the feeling of destitution and drastic vulnerability without them were no doubt considerable. These circumstances are precisely those in which an absolute, purveying a rigid moral template, might seem not merely desirable but *necessary* as a platform from which to distinguish meaningful actions and existence, and from which to resist the claims to authority of rival codes. For this reason Dostoevsky's characters seek to form secular and subjective assurances into something more. Dostoevsky himself also seems compelled, or to force himself, to draw absolute conclusions from a reality he is aware does not support them. Nevertheless, the consequences of these flights into certainty (such as the persisting unrest that dogs Dostoevsky and his characters alike), make the uncertainty which Clough depicts with resilient ambivalence seem not unpregnant (which for an idealist or absolutist it is), but an un-panicked clarity. Consequently, absolute certainty can be seen to be a symptom of the mixture of confusion with a particular ideological profile. It is a symptom, furthermore, which masquerades as a cure, while obscuring the possibility of recognising that the sickness is rooted in ideology not fact.

Clough's work, in contrast, represents as merely redundant the feeling that there are *absolute* moral values and life-goals: there is nothing to guard individuals from responsibility, not only for their actions but also for formulating or choosing the values on which they act.

The extremes of social and political unrest which, in conjunction with spiritual upheaval, played such an important part in forging Dostoevsky's commitment to the

burden of absolutism (a commitment which his representations of the natural world serve to advocate) are not entirely foreign to Clough's characters but they exist for them as peripheral, abstract concerns. Free from domestic particularity and historical contingency, which stamp the crises in Dostoevsky's work so markedly, Clough's works offer accounts of individuals' intellectual and idealistic engagement with the problematic heritage of absolutism. In so doing they approximate a kind of neutrality or objectivity, which still emphasises the human dimensions of this engagement.

History has borne out Dostoevsky's pessimism in regard to the monstrosities that absolutism, isolated from external authority, will often encourage individuals and groups of individuals to commit and attempt to justify in the name of transcendent ideals, and it has shown also the persistent appeal of the kind of reactionary faith, an alternative but no less dangerous front of absolutism, with which Dostoevsky refuses the ambivalent factuality of uncertainty. But history has also left open the option of founding goals on something like Clough's commitment to refuse the heritage of absolutism, secular and supernatural, and to accept uncertainty and compromise as the platform of any credible moral code.

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